

# THE PATHS THAT LEAD TO GOD

WILBUR FISK TILLETT







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## THE MACDONELL LECTURES

This volume contains the MacDonell Lectures for 1923 delivered before the Faculty and students of Scarritt Bible and Training School. The five lectures delivered on this Foundation constitute chapters two, four, seven, ten and fifteen of *The Paths That Lead to God* and were titled as follows:

- I: GOD—WHO, WHAT, AND WHERE IS HE?
- II: THROUGH NATURE TO GOD.
- III: THROUGH MAN TO GOD.
- IV: THROUGH THE BIBLE TO GOD.
- V: THROUGH CHRIST TO GOD.

The author appreciates the courtesy shown by the Trustees and Faculty of Scarritt Bible and Training School in giving their consent to the publication of these lectures as they here appear in this larger group of subjects of which they constitute an integral and important part.

# THE PATHS THAT LEAD TO GOD

*A New Survey of the Grounds of  
Theistic and Christian Belief*

BY

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THE PATHS THAT LEAD TO GOD

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*Dedicated*

TO THE STUDENTS WHO FOR MANY YEARS  
HAVE BEEN TRAVELING WITH THE AUTHOR  
ALONG "THE PATHS THAT LEAD TO GOD"



## PREFACE

All the paths of human knowledge lead to God. In this faith this survey was begun, and in this faith, more deeply fixed than before, it now ends.

The author cannot hope that all his arguments will appeal to all alike. He would be content if he might know that to every reader some one of these arguments should make its appeal and that some one of the paths that are here pointed out has proved a real pathway leading to a larger and stronger faith in God.

This book is not written for the learned, but for learners. The up-to-date scientist, the erudite philosopher, the learned theologian will find little or nothing here to add to their knowledge or to their faith. It is written rather for young men and women, for students, for the inquiring layman, for those who seek rather than for those who have already found; and for those also who, having found, desire suggestions and guidance in helping others to find God and to know him more perfectly when they find him.

Lord Bacon has somewhere compared and contrasted the spider and the honey-bee. The spider weaves his web entirely out of himself and he gathers only that he may himself consume and destroy. The honey-bee builds his multitudinous cells and then goes forth and gathers from abroad sweets from many flowers in many fields. These he combines and stores for others as well as for himself. My readers will find—and I trust appreciate the fact—that I have made the honey-bee and not the spider my model in the preparation of this volume. I have not regarded originality as the thing most needed in a work of this kind. I have indeed myself woven a web of thought and argument every thread of which is, or is at least meant to be, an important part of a symmetrical whole; and this wide-suspended web of faith in spiritual and invisible

realities is, or is at least meant to be, an ascending stairway up which truth-seeking souls may climb from lower to higher thoughts and conceptions of God. If I am to make a volume of largest helpfulness to those for whom it is written, I must gather intellectual sweets from many flowers and fruits from many thought-laden trees.

In carrying out this desire and purpose the author has ventured in this volume more largely than is characteristic of works of this kind not only to refer to but to quote from a large number of authors whose volumes he has found helpful and which he wishes to commend to his readers as helpful to them.

We feel confident, therefore, that neither readers nor authors of volumes quoted, nor their publishers, will find occasion to object to the more than ordinarily liberal quotations which we here and there make from authors whose statements of truth we have found especially strong and illuminating. Not only will these quotations be found to reinforce our own thoughts and arguments in a helpful way, but they will also do what the reading of every good book should, if possible, do—suggest to readers, who are yet learners and need such suggestions, what books they can well afford to add to their own libraries. And these suggestions which we are here making by means of apt quotations will be found to include volumes no longer new (such, for example, as Fairbairn's "Philosophy of the Christian Religion," Fisher's "Grounds of Theistic and Christian Belief," Bruce's "Apologetics," and other volumes of like permanent value) as well as valuable and important new volumes that represent the most recent scholarship. We shall be disappointed if the reading of this volume does not lead thoughtful readers to secure and ponder profitably over volumes referred to and quoted from in these pages.

The author considers himself a modern-minded man, possessed of an open attitude towards the results of modern scholarship, bearing as it does the marks of an honest and sincere spirit of truth-seeking. But he has not so far reacted from the views of the fathers of the past generation as to feel (as many modern apologetes and interpreters of Christianity seem

to feel) that it is best to abandon entirely the time-worn arguments of the older theologians. We live in an age of transition in matters of theological opinion, and it seems to me to be the part of wisdom for teachers and authors who work with and for the rising generation of thoughtful young men and women, instead of undertaking to do their thinking for them and telling them what they must believe, rather to encourage and help them to do their own thinking.

And how can we better show the progress of religious thought than by putting old and new views side by side, and how better stimulate young minds to see and to retain whatever is good and true in the old while being open-minded towards the new? This is the attitude of mind that we would encourage in our readers. And this is to say again that we have not written this book for those who have already thought their way through modern religious problems and are satisfied with the conclusions they have reached; it is rather written for those who are in process of thinking their way through, and would like to have the help of a clear statement of the old and new views which more or less sharply divide the modern religious-thinking world. This present volume attempts to render its readers this service to a larger extent than will be found to characterise recent volumes in the field of theistic and Apologetic literature.

No apology is needed for reproducing in this volume, here and there, various paragraphs and contents of articles that have appeared from time to time in different periodicals and religious journals. It is fitting, however, that mention be made of the fact that the five lectures which it was the privilege of the author to deliver in the Spring of 1923 before the Faculty and students of the Scarritt Bible and Training School on the MacDonell Foundation have, with the consent of the authorities of that institution, been incorporated in the body of this volume—concerning which lectures a more detailed statement is made elsewhere.

We can but think that they who with open minds and hearts walk along these pathways of thought, in travelling which multiplied thousands in all ages of human history have found

## PREFACE

God, will themselves not walk in vain, but will also find themselves journeying with an ever-present, never-failing Divine Companion. A large proportion of those who read such a volume as this are already theistic and Christian believers; and this means that such a volume should not only be adapted to convincing honest and truth-seeking inquirers but should seek to give believers a greater faith in their faith and a clearer vision of spiritual truths which they already see. The author cherishes the hope that such a double mission as this may in some small degree be accomplished by this volume.

The author is not seeking in this volume to take his students and young readers on some short and quickly ended excursion for pastime and pleasure; but on a serious and extended journey into many fields of thought, far and near, the results of which will affect perchance profoundly and radically not only their thoughts and faith in matters of religion but their purposes and plans for life. He is leading them into the broad open fields of nature and science, into intricate and spiritual realms of philosophy and psychology, as well as into the more familiar fields of religion and theology, to seek for and to find God. He is surrounding them here with a great cloud of witnesses, called in from many regions of research and knowledge, that he may furnish cumulative and convincing proof of the reality of God and of the truth of the Christian religion. He is introducing them to many believing thinkers and authors, and this for the purpose of showing them how goodly and great is the company of pilgrims travelling along these paths that lead to God. They who come to know each other in this pilgrimage, teachers and students, authors and readers, constitute a fellowship of truth-loving and truth-seeking souls into which they who enter rejoice to abide.

WILBUR FISK TILLETT.

*Vanderbilt University,  
August 25, 1924.*

## CONTENTS

### CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

#### A Knowledge of God Man's Greatest Need

	PAGE
<b>I: MAN'S SEARCH FOR GOD . . . . .</b>	<b>26</b>
1. <i>The Causes and Occasions for Present-Day Doubts and Inquiries Concerning God . . . . .</i>	27
2. <i>Need for Reinterpreting God and Restating the Grounds of Theistic and Christian Faith in Our Day . . . . .</i>	31
 <b>II: A SURVEY OF THE PATHS THAT LEAD TO GOD . . . . .</b>	 <b>32</b>
1. <i>The Spiritual Interpretation and Use of Nature . . . . .</i>	32
2. <i>Man's Nature a Revelation of God . . . . .</i>	33
3. <i>God's Best Revealer—the Divine-Human Christ . . . . .</i>	36
4. <i>The Divine-Human Book . . . . .</i>	37
5. <i>The Church a Witness for God . . . . .</i>	39
6. <i>The Revelation of God Through Suffering and Death . . . . .</i>	40
7. <i>The Use of Reason in Finding God . . . . .</i>	41

### CHAPTER TWO

#### THE GOD WE SEEK

##### Who Is He? What Is He? Where Is He?

<b>I: ANTI-THEISTIC CONCEPTIONS OF GOD . . . . .</b>	<b>46</b>
1. <i>Polytheism . . . . .</i>	46
2. <i>Dualism . . . . .</i>	48
3. <i>Materialism . . . . .</i>	49
4. <i>Pantheism . . . . .</i>	50
5. <i>Deism . . . . .</i>	52
6. <i>Agnosticism . . . . .</i>	53

	PAGE
II: THE THEISTIC CONCEPTION OF GOD . . . . .	55
1. <i>Belief in God Distinguished from Theories About God</i> . . . . .	56
2. <i>Hebrew Monotheism</i> . . . . .	57
3. <i>Christian Theism</i> . . . . .	59
4. <i>Theistic Dualism</i> . . . . .	61
5. <i>Traditional and Modern Forms of Theism</i> . . . . .	62
III: REINTERPRETING GOD . . . . .	64
1. <i>Enlarging Visions of God</i> . . . . .	64
2. <i>The Faith That Abides While Faiths Change</i> . . . . .	65
IV: WHERE IS GOD? . . . . .	67
1. <i>God's Dwelling-Place</i> . . . . .	67
2. <i>God's Omnipresence and Immanence</i> . . . . .	68
3. <i>God's Real and Abiding Presence</i> . . . . .	69

## CHAPTER THREE

## RELIGION AND RELIGIONS AS RELATED TO GOD

I: WHAT IS RELIGION? . . . . .	73
1. <i>The Origin of Religion</i> . . . . .	73
2. <i>Religion as Interpreted by Theistic Evolutionists</i> . . . . .	75
3. <i>The Ubiquity and Influence of Religion in History</i> . . . . .	76
II: HEATHEN SEEKERS AFTER GOD . . . . .	78
1. <i>The Science of Comparative Religion</i> . . . . .	78
2. <i>The Religions of Ancient Babylonia and Persia</i> . . . . .	81
3. <i>The Religion of Ancient Egypt</i> . . . . .	85
4. <i>The Religions of Ancient Greece and Rome</i> . . . . .	87
III: THE FINAL TEST OF TRUTH IN RELIGION . . . . .	89
1. <i>A Question of Ethics</i> . . . . .	89
2. <i>Error Mixed with Truth in Heathen Religions</i> . . . . .	91
3. <i>The Ethical and Spiritual Religion of Christ</i> . . . . .	92

## CHAPTER FOUR

## THROUGH NATURE TO GOD

	PAGE
I: WHAT IS NATURE? . . . . .	97
II: THE INORGANIC WORLD . . . . .	99
1. <i>The Physical Universe</i> . . . . .	99
2. <i>What is Matter?</i> . . . . .	100
3. <i>What are Atoms, Molecules, Radiant-Matter and Electrons?</i> . . . . .	101
4. <i>What is Energy?</i> . . . . .	104
III: THE ORGANIC WORLD . . . . .	106
1. <i>Whence Comes Life?</i> . . . . .	106
2. <i>Interrelations of Living Things</i> . . . . .	108
IV: THE APPEAL FROM NATURE TO NATURE'S GOD . . . . .	110
1. <i>The Analogy Between Human and Divine Workers</i> . . . . .	111
2. <i>God in His Heavens</i> . . . . .	112
3. <i>God in His World</i> . . . . .	115
V: A REASONABLE INFERENCE . . . . .	110
1. <i>Either God or Chance</i> . . . . .	116
2. <i>The Spiritual Interpretation of Nature</i> . . . . .	118
3. <i>Through Things Beautiful to God</i> . . . . .	120

## CHAPTER FIVE

## THROUGH SCIENCE TO GOD

I: WHAT IS SCIENCE? . . . . .	127
1. <i>The Purpose of Science</i> . . . . .	128
2. <i>Scientists the Proper Teachers of Science</i> . . . . .	129
II: THE DIFFERENT SCIENCES AS RELATED TO FAITH IN A PERSONAL GOD . . . . .	131
1. <i>Through Astronomy to God</i> . . . . .	131
2. <i>Through Physics and Chemistry to God</i> . . . . .	134
3. <i>Through Geology to God</i> . . . . .	136
4. <i>Through Biology to God</i> . . . . .	138

	PAGE
III: SCIENCE AND CHRISTIAN FAITH . . . . .	143
1. <i>Science and the Bible</i> . . . . .	143
2. <i>The Faith of Scientists</i> . . . . .	146

CHAPTER SIX  
EVOLUTION AND GOD

I: WHAT IS EVOLUTION ? . . . . .	155
1. <i>Materialistic and Theistic Evolution Distinguished</i> . . . . .	157
2. <i>"Devolution" as Natural as Evolution</i> . . . . .	159
3. <i>Moral Evolution</i> . . . . .	160
II: THEISTIC EVOLUTION . . . . .	162
1. <i>Evolution as Interpreted by Theistic Scientists— Alexander Winchell, John Fiske, William North Rice, President Hibben, Robert A. Millikan</i> . . . . .	162
2. <i>The Proper Attitude of Christian Believers Towards Evolution</i> . . . . .	169

CHAPTER SEVEN  
THROUGH MAN TO GOD

I: MAN'S KINSHIP TO GOD . . . . .	180
1. <i>The Divine in Man and the Human in God</i> . . . . .	180
2. <i>Anthropomorphism</i> . . . . .	183
II: THROUGH PSYCHOLOGY TO GOD . . . . .	186
1. <i>Human Consciousness</i> . . . . .	187
2. <i>Body and Spirit</i> . . . . .	188
3. <i>Through the Intellect to God</i> . . . . .	188
4. <i>Through the Heart to God</i> . . . . .	190
5. <i>Through the Will to God</i> . . . . .	193
6. <i>Through the Conscience to God</i> . . . . .	197
7. <i>Through the Imagination to God</i> . . . . .	198
8. <i>The New Psychology and the Christian Faith</i> . . . . .	201
9. <i>Human Psychology and the Divine Trinity</i> . . . . .	203
III: MAN'S SOCIAL RELATIONS AND GOD . . . . .	204
1. <i>Through Parenthood to God</i> . . . . .	204
2. <i>Through Government to God</i> . . . . .	206

## CHAPTER EIGHT

## THROUGH PHILOSOPHY TO GOD

	PAGE
I: OURS A RATIONAL UNIVERSE . . . . .	213
1. <i>What is Philosophy?</i> . . . . .	214
2. <i>Relation of Philosophy to Science</i> . . . . .	216
3. <i>Mind a Function of Spirit, Not of Matter</i> . . . . .	217
4. <i>Evidences of Mind in the Physical Universe</i> . . . . .	218
5. <i>Can Chance Explain Our World?</i> . . . . .	220
II: IDEALISM AND REALISM IN PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY . . . . .	222
1. <i>Philosophic and Theistic Idealism</i> . . . . .	222
2. <i>Philosophic and Theistic Realism</i> . . . . .	226
3. <i>Truth in Philosophy Necessary to Truth in Theology</i> . . . . .	229

## CHAPTER NINE

## THROUGH REASON TO GOD

I: THE NECESSITY AND VALUE OF REASON IN RELIGION . . . . .	234
1. <i>The Place of Reason in Religion</i> . . . . .	235
2. <i>The Value of Logic in Theistic Argument</i> . . . . .	237
II: THE GREAT ARGUMENTS OF THEISM . . . . .	239
1. <i>The Argument of Descartes, the Founder of Modern Philosophy</i> . . . . .	240
2. <i>The Ontological Argument</i> . . . . .	242
3. <i>The Cosmological Argument</i> . . . . .	245
4. <i>The Teleological Argument</i> . . . . .	247
5. <i>The Moral Argument</i> . . . . .	252
6. <i>Consensus Gentium</i> . . . . .	256

## CHAPTER TEN

## THROUGH THE BIBLE TO GOD

I: THE OLD TESTAMENT REVELATION OF GOD . . . . .	263
1. <i>God in the Pentateuch</i> . . . . .	263
2. <i>God in Hebrew History</i> . . . . .	264
3. <i>God in the Prophetical and Apocalyptic Writings</i> . .	265
4. <i>God in the Wisdom Literature</i> . . . . .	267
5. <i>God in the Psalms</i> . . . . .	268

	PAGE
II: THE NEW TESTAMENT REVELATION OF GOD . . . . .	269
1. <i>The Fatherhood and Love of God</i> . . . . .	270
2. <i>The Divine Sonship of Christ</i> . . . . .	271
3. <i>St. Paul's Interpretation of Christ as God-Incarnate</i> . . . . .	272
4. <i>St. John's Interpretation of Christ as Divine Love Incarnate</i> . . . . .	274
III: SUMMARY OF THE FUNDAMENTAL TRUTHS OF BIBLICAL THEISM . . . . .	276
1. <i>The Unity of God</i> . . . . .	276
2. <i>The Spirituality of God</i> . . . . .	277
3. <i>The Personality of God</i> . . . . .	278
4. <i>The Triunity of the Divine Being</i> . . . . .	279
5. <i>The Post-Apostolic Development of the Doctrine of God</i> . . . . .	281

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

## THE PROGRESSIVE REVELATION OF GOD IN THE SCRIPTURES

I: DIVINE REVELATION AND ITS HUMAN INTERPRETATION . . . . .	285
1. <i>Progress of Divine Revelation Conditioned on Man's Interpretation of Revelation</i> . . . . .	285
2. <i>Progress in Knowledge of God Retarded by Human Interpreters and Not by Lack of Revelation</i> . . . . .	287
II: PROGRESSIVE REVELATION OF GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT . . . . .	288
1. <i>Superiority of the Early Hebrew Narratives to Heathen Records</i> . . . . .	289
2. <i>Progress from Lower to Higher Conceptions of God a Proof of Revelation</i> . . . . .	290
3. <i>Progressive Ethicisation of the Idea of God</i> . . . . .	292
III: PROGRESSIVE REVELATION OF GOD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT . . . . .	294
1. <i>Progress in the Conception of God from Legalism to Loving Fatherhood</i> . . . . .	295
2. <i>Progress from an Earthly to a Spiritual Messiah</i> . . . . .	296
3. <i>The Advent of the Holy Spirit</i> . . . . .	297
4. <i>Progress as Reflected in the Literature of the New Testament</i> . . . . .	298
5. <i>The Ever-enlarging Conception of God and of the Divine-Human Christ</i> . . . . .	299

## CONTENTS

xvii

PAGE

6. <i>The Finality of the Revelation of Jesus not Inconsistent with Continued Progress</i> . . . . .	301
--	-----

### CHAPTER TWELVE

#### THE DIVINE INSPIRATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

I: WHAT IS BIBLICAL INSPIRATION? . . . . .	307
1. <i>The Traditional Doctrine of Biblical Inspiration</i> . . . . .	308
2. <i>The Modern Scholar's View of Biblical Inspiration</i> . . . . .	310
3. <i>The Two Doctrines as Related to God</i> . . . . .	311
4. <i>The Bible a Divine-Human Book</i> . . . . .	313
II: THE PROOFS OF INSPIRATION . . . . .	
1. <i>Do the Scriptures Claim to be Inspired?</i> . . . . .	315
2. <i>The Method of Inspiration and Revelation</i> . . . . .	316
3. <i>The Practical Proof of Inspiration</i> . . . . .	317
4. <i>The Internal Evidence of Inspiration</i> . . . . .	319
5. <i>Some Witnesses to the Word</i> . . . . .	322

### CHAPTER THIRTEEN

#### THE PLACE OF MIRACLES IN MODERN APOLOGETICS

I: THE PLACE OF MIRACLES IN TRADITIONAL THEOLOGY . . . . .	330
1. <i>The Argument from Miracles</i> . . . . .	330
2. <i>Christ and Miracles</i> . . . . .	331
3. <i>The Miracles of the Old Testament</i> . . . . .	332
II: ARE MIRACLES HELPS OR HINDRANCES TO FAITH? . . . . .	
1. <i>The Natural and the Supernatural Alike Divine</i> . . . . .	334
2. <i>The Supernatural Reinforcement of the Natural</i> . . . . .	335
III: REACTION AGAINST MIRACLES . . . . .	
1. <i>Radical Criticism Stated and Answered</i> . . . . .	340
2. <i>Do Biblical Miracles Furnish Proof or Need Proof?</i> . . . . .	342
3. <i>Miracles, Magic and Science</i> . . . . .	344
4. <i>The Miracles of Ecclesiastical History</i> . . . . .	345
IV: THE REINTERPRETATION OF THE SUPERNATURAL AND RE-AFFIRMATION OF FAITH IN MIRACLES . . . . .	
1. <i>The New Approach to the Supernatural</i> . . . . .	348
2. <i>A Reinterpretation of the Supernatural</i> . . . . .	350

	PAGE
3. <i>Reaffirmation of Faith in the Supernatural</i> . . . . .	353
4. <i>An Impressive Incident</i> . . . . .	355

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE PROPHETS AS INTERPRETERS AND  
REVEALERS OF GOD

I: THE ARGUMENT FROM PROPHECY—ITS VALUE AND LIMITA- TIONS . . . . .	362
1. <i>Prophecy Defined</i> . . . . .	363
2. <i>The Inspiration of the Prophets</i> . . . . .	364
3. <i>Predictive Prophecy</i> . . . . .	367
II: MESSIANIC PROPHECY . . . . .	370
1. <i>Christ the Fulfilment of Messianic Prophecy</i> . . . . .	370
2. <i>Different Interpretations of Messianic Passages</i> . . . . .	374
3. <i>Reaction Against the Argument from Predictive Prophecy</i> . . . . .	377
4. <i>“Accommodations” of Prophetic Language Disting- guished from Fulfilments</i> . . . . .	379
III: THE MORAL SIGNIFICANCE AND VALUE OF PROPHECY . . . . .	383
1. <i>The Prophetic Passion for Righteousness</i> . . . . .	384
2. <i>Prophetic and Priestly Ideals of Righteousness Dis- tinguished</i> . . . . .	386
3. <i>Prophetic Optimism</i> . . . . .	388
4. <i>Prophetic Universalism</i> . . . . .	388

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

## THROUGH CHRIST TO GOD

I: GOD AS REVEALED BY CHRIST . . . . .	394
1. <i>Christ’s Doctrine of God</i> . . . . .	395
2. <i>The Fatherhood and Love of God</i> . . . . .	397
3. <i>Sovereignty and Service</i> . . . . .	399
II: GOD AS REVEALED IN CHRIST . . . . .	400
1. <i>The Divine-Human Person</i> . . . . .	400
2. <i>The Incarnation</i> . . . . .	402
III: GOD AS REVEALED THROUGH CHRIST . . . . .	405
1. <i>Through the Human Jesus to the Divine Christ</i> . . . . .	406

## CONTENTS

xi  
PAGE

<b>2. The Failure of the Sceptical Hypotheses to Account for the Christ of Christianity . . . . .</b>	<b>407</b>
<b>3. The Influence of Christ on the Life of the World . . . . .</b>	<b>410</b>

### CHAPTER SIXTEEN

#### THROUGH THE CHURCH TO GOD

<b>I: A DIVINE-HUMAN INSTITUTION . . . . .</b>	<b>417</b>
1. <i>The Church Defined . . . . .</i>	417
2. <i>The Church a Witness for God . . . . .</i>	419
3. <i>The Church Within the Church . . . . .</i>	421
4. <i>The Enlarging Social Mission of the Church . . . . .</i>	424
<b>II: THE PROBLEM OF CHURCH UNITY . . . . .</b>	<b>425</b>
1. <i>The Significance of a Divided Church . . . . .</i>	425
2. <i>The Good and the Evil of Religious Denominationalism . . . . .</i>	429
3. <i>Christian Unity a Prerequisite of Church Unity . . . . .</i>	430
4. <i>The Primary Credential of a True Church . . . . .</i>	432
5. <i>The True Goal of Christian Catholicity . . . . .</i>	433
<b>III: THE CHURCH'S AGENCIES FOR LEADING MEN TO GOD</b>	<b>436</b>
1. <i>The Christian Ministry . . . . .</i>	436
2. <i>The Christian School . . . . .</i>	438
3. <i>The Sunday School . . . . .</i>	440
4. <i>Christian Literature . . . . .</i>	441
5. <i>The Need for Stirred Souls . . . . .</i>	442

### CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

#### THROUGH THE CREEDS TO GOD

<b>I: THE VALUE OF CREEDS . . . . .</b>	<b>447</b>
1. <i>The Reason for Creeds . . . . .</i>	447
2. <i>The Mutable and the Permanent Elements in the Christian Faith Distinguished . . . . .</i>	448
<b>II: THE HISTORIC CREEDS—ARE THEY HELPS OR HINDRANCES TO FAITH IN OUR DAY? . . . . .</b>	<b>450</b>
1. <i>The Apostles' Creed . . . . .</i>	451
2. <i>The Athanasian Creed . . . . .</i>	457
3. <i>The Westminster Confession of Faith . . . . .</i>	460
4. <i>The Thirty-Nine Articles . . . . .</i>	465

## CONTENTS

	PAGE
III: NEED FOR NEW CREDAL STATEMENTS OF CHRISTIAN FAITH	467
1. <i>New Bottles for the New Wine</i> . . . . .	468
2. <i>Old and New Ideas of Creeds</i> . . . . .	472

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN  
THROUGH DOUBT TO FAITH

I: THE RELATION OF FAITH TO REASON AND RELIGION . . . . .	477
1. <i>The Office of Doubt in Religion</i> . . . . .	477
2. <i>Dishonest Doubt</i> . . . . .	480
3. <i>When No Doubt Means No Faith</i> . . . . .	482
II: SOME TYPES OF HONEST DOUBT . . . . .	484
1. <i>Doubt Due to Temperament</i> . . . . .	484
2. <i>Doubt Due to Trying Conditions and Experiences</i> . .	485
3. <i>Scepticism in Developing Youth Not an Abnormal Experience</i> . . . . .	487
4. <i>The Agnosticism of Faith</i> . . . . .	489
5. <i>When Scepticism Invades the Ministry</i> . . . . .	490
III: THE REINFORCEMENT OF FAITH . . . . .	492
1. <i>The Effects of Christianity in the World</i> . . . . .	492
2. <i>The Cause and Cure of Doubt</i> . . . . .	493
3. <i>The Heroism and Victory of Faith</i> . . . . .	495

CHAPTER NINETEEN  
THROUGH EXPERIENCE TO GOD

I: THE NATURE AND NEED OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE . . . . .	503
1. <i>Experience Man's Best Teacher</i> . . . . .	504
2. <i>The Bible and Christian Theology as Related to Experience</i> . . . . .	506
3. <i>God's Revelation of Himself in and Through Experience</i> . . . . .	508
4. <i>The Dark Pathway of Sin—Forces That Drive Rather Than Draw Men to God</i> . . . . .	510
5. <i>Religious Experience as Related to Prayer</i> . . . . .	512

## CONTENTS

	xxi
	PAGE
<b>II: GOD IN THE EXPERIENCE OF MEN . . . . .</b>	514
1. <i>The Unknown God . . . . .</i>	514
2. <i>God Conceived of as an Enemy . . . . .</i>	515
3. <i>God Obeyed as a Task-Master . . . . .</i>	516
4. <i>God Found as a Friend . . . . .</i>	517
5. <i>God Loved as a Father . . . . .</i>	518
6. <i>Making God Loveable in Human Life . . . . .</i>	519
<b>III: CHRIST IN THE EXPERIENCE OF MEN . . . . .</b>	519
1. <i>Christ Both the Creator and the Creature of Christian Experience . . . . .</i>	521
2. <i>Christian Experience the Essence of Christianity . . . . .</i>	522
3. <i>Christ Alone Essential to Christian Experience . . . . .</i>	523
4. <i>The Christ of History and Experience . . . . .</i>	526
<b>IV: THE RESULTS OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE . . . . .</b>	529
1. <i>The God of Nature and the God of Grace are One in Experience . . . . .</i>	530
2. <i>Religious Experience a Solvent of Religious Perplexities and the Bond of Unity . . . . .</i>	531

## CHAPTER TWENTY

### THROUGH SUFFERING AND DEATH TO GOD

<b>I: THE DIVINE SIGNIFICANCE OF SUFFERING . . . . .</b>	539
1. <i>Physical and Moral Evil Distinguished . . . . .</i>	540
2. <i>Moral Evil as Related to God and Human Free Will . . . . .</i>	543
3. <i>Physical Evil as Related to God—the Educative and Moral Value of Suffering . . . . .</i>	545
4. <i>The "Acts of God" Misinterpreted . . . . .</i>	546
5. <i>Good and Evil as Interpreted by Optimism and Pessimism . . . . .</i>	548
6. <i>Suffering and Song . . . . .</i>	552
<b>II: THE DIVINE SIGNIFICANCE OF DEATH . . . . .</b>	555
1. <i>Death as a Revealer of God and Immortality . . . . .</i>	556
2. <i>The Why of Physical Death—Its Moral and Educative Value . . . . .</i>	557
3. <i>Death the Removal of Physical Limitations to Man's Spiritual Activities . . . . .</i>	559
4. <i>God, Death and Immortality as Interpreted by the Poets . . . . .</i>	561

## CONTENTS

	PAGE
5. <i>The Confidence and Sunny Certainty of Christ Concerning the Future</i> . . . . .	566
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	569
INDEX . . . . .	575

## CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

A KNOWLEDGE OF GOD MAN'S GREATEST NEED



# THE PATHS THAT LEAD TO GOD

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### A KNOWLEDGE OF GOD MAN'S GREATEST NEED

There is nothing more needed in the world to-day, or in any day, than for men to have a deep conviction of the existence of a living God. Some objects of knowledge are possible only to the few—to the wise and learned. A knowledge of God is possible to all men. A true conception of God is foremost in importance among all the objects of human knowledge that is possible to all men. Until a man orients himself rightly with reference to God, it is impossible for him to give that direction to his life which can alone insure his reaching that goal which is the only aim and end that can satisfy the soul of a rational and immortal being. There is no preparation for large and efficient life-service that is so primary and fundamental as that awakening and inspiration which results from a vision of God and an experience of his presence and power in one's life. The Christian worker above all men is dependent upon his knowledge of God and a right relationship to him for that spiritual equipment and guidance without which there can be no real success in Christian service and no real happiness in Christian experience. It was the revelation and vision of God which Moses received at the burning bush in the Arabian desert that was not only the beginning of his life of service, but it was in the truest sense his enduement with

the knowledge and power that enabled him to found and organise the greatest nation in moral achievement in the ancient world. The vision which Paul received of his divine Lord was in like manner the turning point in his career and the beginning of his life of unequalled service in spreading the Christian religion throughout the world.

## I

## MAN'S SEARCH FOR GOD

Not only is it true that a knowledge of God is man's first and greatest need, but it is also true that men are at all times and everywhere seeking God. The deep-thinking philosopher and the unthinking peasant travel along different roads in their search for God, but both alike are seeking Him who alone can explain their problems and meet their respective needs. Whether men are conscious of it or not, and whether they acknowledge it to themselves or not, they are all, with varying degrees of intelligence and sincerity, seeking God. Many of these seekers after God need guidance and counsel that they may not miss the way. There are many misleading guide-posts and sign-boards along the way, saying, "Lo, God is here," or "Lo, God is there"; but, following them, men find him not. There are no paths that human beings tread that need to be made plain and kept open so truly as the paths that lead to God. He who would help men to find God must interpret him in terms of thought and speech adapted to the intellectual and religious conditions and states of mind characteristic of the age. In meeting these needs in any age the religious perplexities and obstacles to faith incident to that age have to be considered. Hence books on Theism and the Philosophy of Religion, on Apologetics and the Evidences of Christianity, must be written afresh for each generation. For the world to be content from generation to generation with one and the same text book on Theism or Apologetics would indicate that it was intellectually static and spiritually stagnant. For a book, even a good book, to become obsolete is often a sign and proof of healthful religious activity and progress.

*I. The Causes and Occasions for Present-Day Doubts and Inquiries Concerning God*

Each new generation has its own causes and occasions for fresh inquiry concerning the nature and character of God—inquries which, however indicative they may be on the surface of doubt, are more deeply indicative of faith in the personality and power and in the wisdom and goodness of the Divine Being who created, sustains and governs the universe. There are some forms of doubt and unrest in religion that are signs of healthful thought and progress, and others that are indications of unhealthful and perilous tendencies in the moral and religious life of men and nations. It is important to distinguish the one from the other. The former may be safely let alone; the latter needs to be carefully considered as to its causes and its cure.

Much of the religious unrest and doubt of our day is expressing itself in questions that bear on the existence and character of God to an extent which, some think, has rarely if ever been equalled before in the history of human thought. Some of the causes for these questions about God are manifest and easily named. Four or five of these need only to be named in order to be recognised at once as provoking causes of doubt and inquiry in our day.

First and most immediate in our day is the recent great World War and the ills that have followed it, involving the sufferings not of the guilty alone, but even more of innocent people to such an extent and to a degree so appalling as to cause men to ask how God could be possessed of infinite power, infinite knowledge and infinite goodness and allow such wrongs and sufferings to take place. If he could prevent so great an evil, but would not, they have asked—repeating the age-old question raised in the book of Job—how can we regard him as infinitely good? If he would have prevented it, but could not, can we regard him as infinite in power? If God is infinite both in power and in goodness, do not such unspeakable evils as this World War and the suffering of innocent men, women and children involved in it, prove that things like these are

outside the sphere of his operation and control? Who then, or what, is God anyway? And where? Thus men have been led to question his goodness, his power and his wisdom, and even his existence. Is there no answer to such questions?

A second subtle cause of unrest has been at work. Men's ideas and ideals of governments and their rulers have changed from that of an arbitrary, imperial and absolute monarchy where the ruler's will was the one and only law, from which there was no appeal, to a commonwealth and government of and over free beings whose interests are so identified with those of their ruler as to make him the embodiment of a democratic ideal of lordship, which means, or should mean, that love and beneficence control the will and direct the power of the ruler. The God of traditional Calvinistic theology with his sovereign and absolute will deciding the destiny of men before they are born, and the course of their lives after they are born, no longer satisfies the minds and consciences of modern thinking men who demand that God's sovereignty shall be interpreted in terms of a divine and social democracy which they believe is the divine ideal of government for God as well as for earthly rulers and governments. This means that God is the Ruler of free beings who may defy as well as obey, his will; and his government of men and nations involves overruling the rebellious as well as ruling the righteous and obedient.

Again, the rise of the doctrine of evolution and its acceptance in the scientific world has been so pronounced and widespread as to create not only unrest but alarm on the part of those who have believed that creation was an instantaneous act of God accomplished in six days; and these disturbed believers have interpreted the doctrine of evolution as getting rid of God in the realm of nature and as deifying and enthroning natural law and physical force.

Coupled with this cause, and more or less identified with it, is the fact that ours is pre-eminently an age of science, and science presupposes and is based on faith in the absolute regularity and uniformity of the operation of nature's laws; and so deeply does this conviction as to natural law possess the mod-

ern mind that there is a growing tendency to call in question the accuracy of any statements as to the past which represent certain events as having been brought about by a divine interruption of nature's laws. There is therefore a manifest and outspoken tendency not only to retire miracles from the foreground to the background of modern Apologetics, but to drop them entirely as an argument unconvincing to the modern scientific mind. This appears to many as being tantamount to eliminating everything supernatural from the Christian religion.

In like manner, modern scholars by reinterpreting the Bible in keeping with the principles of literary and historical criticism applied to all other types and realms of ancient literature, have made it to appear that the human element in the Scriptures is a source of possible error in the sacred record and interpretation of events and facts, some of which affect more or less seriously the character of God, especially the God of the Old Testament. In so doing the modern scholars have seemed to believers in the traditional doctrine of Biblical inspiration and inerrancy to take God out of the Bible, as evolutionists have seemed to them to take him out of nature as its Creator and Preserver.

Yet a fifth cause for theological unrest and for questions about God should be mentioned. A change has come about in men's attitude towards the heathen religions of the world. Most of the traditional types of theology prevalent in the past have interpreted these religions as false, as more satanic than divine in their origin and form of manifestation, and have regarded the heathen, because of these false religions, as children of the devil and as such necessarily without God and without hope in the world. The modern science of Comparative Religions has, on the contrary, more and more interpreted these religions as a proof of men's search for God and as an honest and sincere expression of their faith in God, regarding them as something inadequate, erroneous and unsatisfying rather than as something false, sinful and satanic in origin and form. Many have found it difficult and confusing to adjust this new attitude towards the heathen religions of the

world to the fact that our conception of God and our Christian faith constitute the one and only true and saving religion in the world.

Now it may be that these five things which I have mentioned—the unspeakable atrocities of the World War, the incoming of modern democratic ideals of government and sovereignty, the scientific doctrine of evolution, the modern scholar's view of the human element in the Bible as the source of possible error, and the new science of Comparative Religions—should not, and would not if properly interpreted, raise doubts as to the existence or the beneficent activity of God, or in any way dethrone him or impeach his character as an absolutely perfect Being. But, as a matter of fact, it is quite certain that all five of the facts named have caused, and are causing, questions about God's existence and character that need to be answered. Nor do these by any means exhaust the causes of religious unrest and of the inquiries concerning God and his Providence that are characteristic of our day.

And it may turn out that the only satisfactory answer to these questions will involve or result in a reinterpretation of God in terms of modern thought and faith and in a restatement of the Christian doctrine of God in different language from that found in the historic creeds of Christendom. If so, what shall the reinterpretation be? Where will the new emphasis be placed?

But, after all, these inquiries about God, even though they may seem to be critical of the Church and her creeds, and to imply doubts as to the very existence of an omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient Being of infinite goodness, are a proof of the prevalent, widespread and undying interest of men in religion. Men are "incurably religious," and they cannot rest without a satisfying conception of God. To doubt at the right time and the right place and to give expression in the right manner to this doubt may be the best cure for doubt and the best evidence of an irrepressible faith. Honest doubt concerning God and matters of religion may save faith from superstition and lead to a faith that is at once intelligent, sane

and satisfying, and mark a forward movement in the progress of religious thought and Christian faith.

*2. Need for Reinterpreting God and Restating the Grounds of Theistic and Christian Faith in our Day*

A recent thoughtful and illuminating volume by Bishop Charles Gore of Oxford, England, titled "Belief in God," has attracted wide attention among scholars and theologians by its able discussion of the fundamentals of Theistic faith. He considers especially the question as to how our conception and interpretation of God have been affected by the results of modern scientific research and biblical scholarship. A second volume, titled "Belief in Christ," does for God incarnate, the divine-human Person of Christian faith, what the first volume undertook to do for faith in God. The first chapter in Bishop Gore's "Belief in God" is titled "The Breakdown of Tradition" and begins with this sentence: "The world in which we live to-day can only be described as chaotic in the matter of religious beliefs."

"If I read our times aright," says Sir Henry Jones, in beginning his lectures on the Gifford Foundation at the University of Glasgow, Scotland, "there are thousands of thoughtful men in this country whose interest in religion is sincere, but who can neither accept the ordinary teaching of the Church nor subject themselves to its dogmatic ways. I would fain demonstrate to these men, both by example and precept, that the enquiry which makes the fullest use of the severe intellectual methods, supports those beliefs upon which a religion worth having rests. Let man seek God by the way of pure reason and he will find him." The Church is here to stay; but its "dogmatic ways"—and this phrase, interpreted etymologically, simply means its "ways of teaching fundamental truth"—are not only subject to change, but should be changed from time to time if they are to be made most effective in each succeeding generation.

Each generation has its own special religious needs; but the need for a fresh study of God, for a new realisation of his presence and power, and a new interpretation of him in terms

of the living thought of the faith of the day, is an ever-present need of every generation of men. Some things are subjects of occasional thought. God is the one supreme subject that is always the foremost object of thought among men. As rational beings we cannot think and reason without taking into our thought and into our reasoning Him in whom we live and move and have our being.

The cure of theological and religious unrest that may characterise our own or any other age can only come through serious and honest thinking, with open, truth-seeking minds and truth-loving hearts bent on not only finding out who God is and where he is, but on getting acquainted with him and knowing him,—bent on knowing his will not for the purpose of idly speculating about it, and correcting the opinions of others, but for the purpose of doing that will in and through self-forgetful and sacrificial service for others. These are the pilgrims for whose guidance we are making inquiries concerning “the paths that lead to God.”

## II

### A SURVEY OF THE PATHS THAT LEAD TO GOD

#### *I. The Spiritual Interpretation and Use of Nature*

The first path that we shall take we designate “Through Nature to God.” To reason from nature, physical nature, up to nature’s God is to follow a stream of thought that always empties itself into that boundless ocean whose depths no man can fathom. Science is the careful and comprehensive study of nature in all its phases in order to discover and register its laws; and when it is recognised that all laws are but the methods and means by and through which some personal will acts, every devout and observant student of science will find that to study science is to travel through nature to a God whose personal power can alone explain the laws of nature. Whether we study nature extensively or intensively, whether we look through the telescope at the unnumbered worlds of light that constitute our universe, or through the microscope

at the elementary substances and ingredients that enter into mineral, chemical and biological forms of existence that are called atoms and electrons, we are driven alike along each and every one of these highways and byways of thought to the irresistible conclusion that Nature as we know it is inexplicable without a personal God.

One of John Fiske's famous volumes bears the title "Through Nature to God." It is chiefly interesting in that it shows how profoundly convinced an ardent evolutionist and student of science can be that nature rightly interpreted furnishes irresistible and overwhelming proof that there is a God, which proof he considers confirmed in and through human nature by "the everlasting reality of religion."

## *2. Man's Nature a Revelation of God*

From physical nature we pass to another pathway which we may designate as "Through Man to God." However valuable may be the material which physical nature furnishes for the study of the nature and attributes of the Divine Being, human nature furnishes material yet more valuable and trustworthy. Seeing that man was made in the image of God, and continues to bear his image, to reason from man's nature back to God, and up to God, should prove a sure and satisfying pathway to a knowledge of the Creator. This will suggest various subsidiary lines of approach that might bear designations such as "Through psychology to God," "Through conscience to God," "Through philosophy to God," which phrases at once suggest man's intellectual, emotional and volitional nature, and point to the fact that he is possessed of a conscience and of moral free agency. Human nature, therefore, as well as, and even more than, physical nature, when carefully studied furnishes to the mind of man arguments which, when logically combined, not only make irresistible the conclusion that there is a God, but prove much as to the essential character of the Divine Being.

As the mind of man thinks, as the heart feels and loves, as the will chooses among different alternatives and as by its volitions a man becomes a conscious cause of certain definite

and desired effects, so, from these subjective psychological facts and experiences, he infers, and cannot escape the conviction, that, back of and over and above himself and all nature, there must be a supreme Being possessed of these functions and powers without which nature and finite personality would be inexplicable. And it is not easy to see how man could carry in his wonderfully complex nature a stronger and more convincing proof that the Creator and Governor of the world must be a moral Being than is furnished by the universal presence in man of a conscience, a moral consciousness, a sense of right and wrong and responsibility that proclaims the existence of a moral law and moral government which absolutely require a moral God to explain them.

John Locke, the well-known English philosopher, in his famous "Essay concerning the Human Understanding," gives expression to a profound conviction in these words: "I presume I may say that we more certainly know that there is a God than that there is anything else without us." We do not wonder therefore to find that this eminent philosopher followed this volume with another titled, "The Reasonableness of Christianity."

Some intuitive philosophers contend that the idea of God is innate, that it is born with us and in us, that it is an intuitive truth and involved in our very consciousness, and is therefore a condition of thought and not something demanding a process of reason and to be reached only as a conclusion. The knowledge of God, say they, is an instinct of the soul; and while it may be confirmed by reason, it does not need reason to account for its existence. If this be true, then every man has in his own self-consciousness the God whom he seeks, and all his studies of nature and human nature will simply mean an increase and enlargement of his knowledge of One whom he already knows in part.

When Helen Keller, deaf, dumb and blind from early childhood, had been so educated that others were able to communicate with her, and find out her thoughts, and convey thoughts to her, they arranged it so that Phillips Brooks should first talk to her concerning God. And when he told her concern-

ing the Creator and Heavenly Father she burst into the utmost rapture that she was capable of manifesting and responded through her interpreter that she had long had thoughts about him and had so much wanted some one to talk to her about him. Possibly no instance could be taken from actual human life more favourable to the view that the idea of God is innate than this of Helen Keller, who, it was discovered, had had a knowledge of God and an experience with him, long before any communication concerning him had come to her from the outside world.

“Through Philosophy to God” is thus a phrase that points to a method of approaching the infinite and eternal Person through a process of thought and reason that sustains the same relation to the human mind and its laws that science sustains to physical nature and its laws. Science has to deal with the facts and phenomena of nature; philosophy and metaphysics deal with the fundamental ideas of the mind and the causes of things, with the underlying but invisible principles at the foundation of things in so far as they are objects of thought and knowledge. But if theism is true the fundamental and ultimate fact of all being is God. All theistic philosophy is theology in that it finds the explanation of all things, the reason why they are what they are, in God.

To study God’s revelation of himself in the history of the human race ought to be a pathway to God as truly as that which leads through nature and science. The fact that free agents so often, whether acting separately as individuals or collectively in groups and as nations, oppose and thwart the purposes of God concerning them, makes it more difficult to trace the footprints of the Governor of men in history than it is to trace the footprints of the Creator in physical nature. And yet, rightly interpreted, history is a revelation of God’s nature and of his providential government of men. The philosophy of the Christian Religion is a study not only of the dominant and all pervasive influence of religion in history, but to some extent of the moral philosophy of history, of the hand of God, as seen in the life of men and nations, especially as influenced by their religions and their conceptions of God.

*3. God's Best Revealer—the Divine-Human Christ*

But there is a plainer and surer path to God than either physical nature or human nature—it is through Him who alone of all earthly beings possessed not only a complete human nature, but a divine-human nature. "Through Christ to God" will, therefore, furnish our best approach to an understanding and knowledge of the nature and attributes of God. The first path (nature) will lead us to God the Creator; the second (human nature) will lead us to discover God not only as Creator, but as the moral Governor of those free moral beings whom he created in his own image. This third path, the divine-human Christ, will bring us to a knowledge of God as not only a Creator and Governor, but as our loving heavenly Father—and if perchance one has forfeited through wilful and persistent sin his right to be called a child of God, Christ reveals himself as one who can restore the prodigal son to his Father's household. If we start upon this path with Christ, looking upon Him as a mere man, as did the disciples of old, before we have reached the end of the journey our fellowship with him will convince us that he was more than a man—that he who called himself the Son of Man was really the Son of God even more truly than he was the Son of Man.

While God could and did reveal something of himself in and through physical nature, and still more of himself in and through human nature, it was only when he had a divine-human Nature in whom and through whom to reveal himself that his revelation could be adequate and complete. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father," said Christ, and this he said, not so much to tell us that he himself was like God as that God the Father was like himself, the Son. The incarnate Christ revealed God not only in the words he spoke concerning him, and in the God-like deeds with which his life was crowded and crowned, but, being the divine Son and the express image of the Father, in his person also he revealed and glorified him. It is impossible to exaggerate, or even

adequately to express, the value of the revelation of God which the incarnate divine-human Christ brought to men.

But we cannot think of God in Christ as the Saviour without thinking of man as a sinner. "Through Sin to God" seems on first thought to be an expression that involves a contradiction, an ethical impossibility; and yet rightly interpreted the phrase indicates that man may be driven to God as well as drawn to him. The deep and awful helplessness and misery of the human soul in the experience of sin and guilt compel the sinner, through very anguish and wretchedness of spirit, to realise the need of a God who can forgive and blot out sin and deliver him from its awful bondage. "Who can forgive sins but God only?" A blessed day for the sinner is it when he is driven to exclaim and cry out in his anguish of soul, "Oh, wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?" The best thing that sin can do for a man is to make him feel the need of a divine Saviour from sin, and thus drive him to God.

#### 4. *The Divine-Human Book*

"Through the Bible to God" is perhaps the most familiar of all the paths that lead to the divine Being; and yet if the Bible be not read thoughtfully and interpreted truly, it may, taken in its entirety, lead to confused and contradictory ideas of God. Read with discrimination and interpreted as a progressive revelation of God extending over hundreds or even thousands of years, and completed only in and by Christ, who was the one and only absolutely perfect revealer of God, it becomes the best of all guide-books for pilgrims who are in search of God. It has long been common to designate this path to God as that of divine revelation in contrast to that of nature and human reason—the supernatural as distinct from the natural and human. As Christ is a divine-human person, so may we regard the Bible as a divine-human book in a sense that is not true of any other book in the literature of the world. No interpretation of the Bible can be true to the facts which fails to recognise both the human and the

divine elements that enter into its composition. The writers are as genuinely human as any writers in all literature; and to rob them of their human limitations and imperfections is not to add to, but to detract from, the value of their writings; and yet there is a something in their writings, an element of moral and spiritual truth in their messages, that is so much above what is found in other religious writings, that it has justified the claim that the writers of this most remarkable and influential of all books were divinely inspired.

This divine-human book, moreover, contains a record of certain events which are so far above and beyond anything which nature or man, as we know them, can bring about that they are called miracles or supernatural events; and these have to be most carefully studied and interpreted if they are to be helps and not hindrances to faith in our day. There are also certain predictions of future events, especially concerning the coming in the fulness of time of one who is called the Messiah, which are so far beyond the ordinary powers of the human mind to foresee and foretell that they have been interpreted as divine revelations possible only to omniscience. The most outstanding characteristic of the Hebrew Scriptures is its monotheistic conception and definition of God in terms of spirituality, personality, unity and holiness, in marked contrast with the materialistic, pantheistic, and polytheistic conceptions of God found in other ancient religions; while the revelation of God in terms of Fatherhood and love is, in like manner, the most notable contribution made by the New Testament to the religious thought and life of mankind.

The books of the Old Testament have been well designated as "the divine library." The first book in this "Library" begins with the words "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Among the last, and possibly the very last, of all the inspired books in date of composition is St. John's Gospel, and it begins with a sentence no less majestic and noble than the first words in Genesis: "In the beginning was the Word; and the Word was with God, and the Word was

God." The Bible begins, continues and ends with God as does no other book in all literature.

### 5. *The Church a Witness for God*

The Church is composed of those who know God in and through a personal experience and are organised to bring those who know him not into that saving knowledge which they enjoy. It is only in and through experience that any one can attain unto a satisfactory knowledge of God. One may get an intellectual conception of God from others, and learn something about God from creeds and from books of theology; he may have pointed out to him all these pathways to God that we have noted, and which other men have travelled and are still travelling; but not until he himself has a vitalising experience with God will he really know him. To be told that God hears and answers prayer, that he forgives the sin of every truly penitent soul that humbly seeks pardon, that he can break the bondage of sinful habit and remove the sense of guilt from the conscience of contrite sinners who turn from their wicked ways; that he can put a new love in one's heart and a new song in one's mouth—one may hear and assent to all this, and still be a stranger to God. But let him put all these matters to the test of experience, and find out for himself that God is a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God; let him know in his own heart the joy of sins forgiven and feel the expulsive power of a new and divine affection—and from that moment he will know God, and find him wherever he goes, and every path he travels will become to him a pathway to God—indeed God will reveal himself and be in close communion with him all along the way and not simply at the end of his pilgrimage. This does not mean that everything will be from this time on exactly as he would have it—that trials and tribulations will be at an end in his life—far from it. But it does mean that he will have found in the grace of God and in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit that which will not only sustain in every trial, but even turn his very trials into spiritual blessings and make his

life more effective in service to others. Of all the proofs that there is a God, the crowning evidence is that of personal experience.

Not, then, until men have an experience of God can there be a Church, a divine-human institution composed of those who know God, an organised body of true believers whose one great and divine mission is to lead men to God. Only those who know God by experience are prepared to seek and find those who know him not, and lead them into a saving knowledge of him. As in the study of the divine-human Person and of the divine-human Book, so in the study of the divine-human Institution as a path that leads to God, it is all important for us to recognise both the divine and the human elements that enter into it. After making all due allowance for its errors and shortcomings, no one can deny that the Church is the greatest agency in the world for guiding men to a saving knowledge of God. It is the mission of the Church, working as a corporate body and in its individual members, to use all possible means and methods of leading a lost world to God. To be lost is to be away from God; to find God and to know him aright is the goal of human thought and the end of life. Heaven is, whatever else it may or may not be, the place where we shall know God even as we are known by him. To help men find and know God here on earth, and to find and know him in the final and more perfect fellowship of heaven—that is the great mission of the Church militant until it becomes the Church triumphant.

#### *6. The Revelation of God Through Suffering and Death*

It is only through suffering that some men are ever brought to a sense of their need of God, and when we recall that those who already know God are brought to a fuller and deeper knowledge of him oftener perhaps through suffering of one kind and another than through any other agency, we recognise in the discipline of suffering an instrument which divine grace transforms into a beneficent pathway to God. And when suffering has done its worst, when one comes to tread the winepress alone, or when the cup of sorrow is being drunk

and drained to its very dregs as one sees a life that he loves better than his own go out in the darkness of death, then one's first thought may be, and indeed often is with the light-minded and light-hearted, "There is no God—there can be no God—or such suffering and sorrow could never be." But, on second thought, more deep-minded and deep-hearted, the suffering soul finds that God in the deeps of sorrow whom he never cared to find on the surface of a self-centred life.

When a man buries his loved one there comes to him not only new and deeper thoughts about a future life and a profounder realisation of the necessity of it in order to satisfy the deepest desires of the soul, but he realises that there can be no future and eternal life unless there be a God—and unless there be suffering and death. And when one approaches death himself, his heart cries out for a living God. No argument for a God is more potent than that which comes from a new-made grave. Then it is that He who alone brings life and immortality to light is welcomed as an abiding guest. It is through death that we learn of deathlessness; and it is only in and through death that we can enter into that life where alone it is possible for God fully to reveal himself to those who bear his image.

### *7. The Use of Reason in Finding God*

Reason arrays all these facts into arguments and transforms them into a faith that hath foundations. It is only as intelligent and rational beings that we can travel along these pathways of thought that spread out before us in our search for God. "Through Reason to God" is a phrase which indicates that a satisfactory knowledge of God may be arrived at through a process of reason; that the world and human life abound in facts and experiences which furnish to the mind of man the arguments which, when logically combined, not only make irresistible the conclusion that there is a God, but prove much as to the essential character of the Divine Being whose existence is thus proved. It is probably true that few if any intelligent human beings have ever lived who did not find themselves at times driven by reason to faith in the existence of a

Divine Being—times when the conviction came to them and pressed itself upon them that the denial of a personal Creator and Ruler of the universe is more unreasonable than the assumption of such a Being. All these paths that we are to travel are paths of reason, paths of thought involving rational processes and leading to rational conclusions. We may say, and say truly, that most men come “through the heart to God”—through the feelings, through love, through a longing for companionship with the Infinite, and All-loving—and this may seem to be an approach to God through a pathway quite different from that of reason; but the moment we think about it and construct it into an argument, it becomes a rational process and takes its place in theology and philosophy.

With this general survey of the paths that we are to travel we pause to consider more definitely, before entering upon our pilgrimage along these great highways of truth, who it is that we are seeking to find and to know. There are gods many and lords many. Surely there is some One among them all, if we can only find him, in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. To know him aright will secure personal and spiritual fellowship with him in a life that is eternal. We inquire, therefore, concerning God—Who is he? What is he? Where is he?

## CHAPTER Two

### THE GOD WE SEEK

WHO IS HE? WHAT IS HE? WHERE IS HE?



## CHAPTER TWO

### THE GOD WE SEEK

WHO IS HE? WHAT IS HE? WHERE IS HE?

The moral character and influence of men and nations may be determined in no small degree by the answer they give to the question, "Who is God?" As a nation's God is, so is that nation. A people's idea of God and their fidelity or infidelity to that idea are not only an index of what they have been in the past morally, but it is the greatest and most influential single factor in determining what they will become morally in the future, and what they will accomplish in the way of moral achievement. The history of civilisation and the history of religion are vitally related to each other. The highest intellectual and moral greatness is impossible to those who have low and debasing ideas of God. To believe in and worship an immoral and unholy God cannot fail to degrade and debase the worshipper. On the other hand, to believe in and worship a God of infinite holiness and love is to fill the soul of the worshipper with aspirations after the moral qualities of the God whom he worships. The same relation that exists between a worshipper and his god, applies in the main to a nation and its god. Men, religions, churches, nations, may all be weighed accurately in those moral and spiritual scales which register high and low conceptions of God.

There is no need that we should try to separate the three questions that appear above in the title of this chapter; for, in answering the question, "Who is God?", we will be telling what he is and what he is not, and in telling who he is and what he is, we will be telling where he is and where he is not.

The answers which men have given to the question as to who and what God is, divide the faiths of men into certain great classes or groups designated by certain terms which are

familiar to all students of religion, viz., polytheism, dualism, monism (of which materialism and pantheism are the most notable types), deism, Hebrew monotheism, and Christian Theism.

## I

## ANTI-THEISTIC CONCEPTIONS OF GOD

Among the many anti-theistic conceptions of God that have prevailed among men we shall consider only six in our present discussion.

*I. Polytheism*

A large portion of the human race have been polytheists and have believed in many gods. The further back we go towards primitive man and the lower we descend in the scale of civilisation, the greater is the number of gods found in the religious faiths of men. The faith of primitive man and the lowest savages, such as those found in the heart of Africa and in Australia, is designated as Fetishism, which crude faith sees a deity in almost every object of nature and something divine in numerous animals, especially in objects and animals which are abnormal, uncouth and uncanny in appearance. The heathen nations with whom the children of Israel came in contact at the various stages of their checkered history were all polytheists. Abraham was surrounded by polytheists in ancient Chaldea, and archaeologists in unearthing the long-buried records of ancient Babylonia find evidences of a most elaborate and highly developed polytheism which gave names to deities which were supposed to represent the sun, the moon, the sky and many other objects of nature. In Egypt polytheism took the form of deifying and worshipping every kind of animal. The heathen tribes originally occupying the land of Canaan and immediately surrounding the country after it was occupied by the Hebrew nation, were all polytheists and idolators worshipping gods made with their own hands. The most refined and poetic form of polytheism was that of ancient Greece and Rome where there were greater and lesser gods

and goddesses, ruled over by Jupiter, the over-lord, whose throne was on Mt. Olympus and who had under him, sometimes to aid and sometimes to hinder him, lesser gods like Mars, Neptune, Pluto, Apollo, Minerva, Venus, Juno and others whose names have been enshrined in literature and art and have become a part of the poetry and mythology of the civilised world.

The fact that the sex idea—father, mother and child—runs through all life, naturally suggested to primitive minds its application to Deity. Scientists tell us that even vegetable life in bringing forth seed after its kind is subject to this law of life—in part at least. The honey bee in bearing the pollen from the male to the female flowers makes the fruit possible. Not a few of the polytheistic religions of the world have followed the suggestion of nature in this regard, and have found the central and dominant idea of their religions, and of their conception of deity, in this thought of the origin of all life in the adaptation of male and female to each other for the propagation of life, and have carried the distinction into the realm of the Supra-mundane World. But, as applied and developed by them, it has always resulted in a debasement of religion and in a degrading of deity. The most popular of the gods of ancient Egypt were the deities of fertility, Osiris, the father-god, and his sister-wife, Isis, who is pictured as a mother-goddess nursing a child-god, Horus by name. The gods of the Greeks and Romans were male and female gods and goddesses whose offspring in turn were divinely begotten gods and goddesses.

“The Baal divinities of pagan Semitic peoples, Babylonians, Phoenicians, Canaanites, all have their female companions. Sexuality is a radical characteristic of deity as conceived by these peoples. That means sensuality introduced into religion, sexual prostitution erected into an act of worship, whereby Semitic paganism becomes stamped with an exceptional vileness. What a contrast is here in the idea of God, and what diverse fruit it must bear in social life; on one side severe purity, on the other revolting, unmentionable vice! Whence this vast difference between Israel and peoples to which she

is close of kin in blood and language?"<sup>1</sup> The answer and explanation can only be found in Jehovah whom the Israelites chose to be their God and in the people who were what they were because Jehovah chose them to be his people.

"The belief in a feminine element in the Divine was mixed up with matters of sex," says Dr. Gwatkin, "and led to such gross excesses that decent religions have always looked on it with great and just suspicion. Yet its truth is undeniable for those who confess the image of God in man, unless the 'feminine' virtues are either rejected or placed in a lower class."<sup>2</sup>

Thus, fundamental as is the idea of fatherhood and motherhood in relation to life and its propagation, every attempt to interpret deity in terms of sex and sexual relationships has in time led to the debasing of deity and the ultimate dissolution of the religion that attempted it. It would seem that all the precious truth as to parenthood that can be gotten into the conception of deity, and that properly belongs to God, has been incorporated into the Christian conception of God, and has found expression in the nature and character of the heavenly Father, as he has been revealed by Christ.

## 2. *Dualism*

There have been thoughtful people in all ages of human history who, finding it impossible to reconcile the presence and power of evil in the world with the existence of a God infinite in power and goodness, have found relief in the belief that there are two eternal existences, Spirit and Matter, the one the source of all that is good, the other the source of all that is evil. Sometimes the source of evil in the world has been conceived of as an eternal principle of evil in the nature of finite existence, or as an evil Spirit co-eternal with another Spirit who is the personal source of all good. Dualism has found its most notable historic expression in the Zoroastrian religion of ancient Persia, though there have been other expressions of this faith both in the ancient and in the medieval and modern world.

<sup>1</sup> A. B. Bruce, "Apologetics," p. 223.

<sup>2</sup> "Knowledge of God," Vol. I, p. 258.

The ancient sect of Christians known as Gnostics held a dualistic theory of the world. Spirit and matter, good and evil, are essentially opposed to each other. The Gnostics thought whatever comes in contact with matter shares in its contamination; therefore the supreme God cannot, they said, be the Creator of the world containing matter that is intrinsically evil. The supreme God or First cause is so transcendent and utterly remote from all that we know as existing, we cannot predicate anything of him (or it) with certainty. A series of divine beings called *Æons* emanate in pairs from the First Cause. One of these *Æons* was the Creator (Demiurgos) of the World, the Jehovah of the Old Testament, the only God known to the Jews. The material world which he creates is in itself by nature evil; and from this evil nothing that is in any way material can be free. All physically embodied spirits suffer from the contaminating evil. Redemption consists in the liberation of finite spirits, sparks of Deity, which had become entangled in the meshes of matter and man. This was accomplished by Christ, another *Æon* from the great First Cause, who came largely to undo the evil which the Creator did in connecting spirits with material bodies.<sup>1</sup> Christ's physical nature, they said, was not real; it was docetic; it was a phantasm, an appearance only, not real flesh and blood such as belongs to normal human beings.

### 3. *Materialism*

Among the anti-theistic answers that are given to the question "What is God," that which in our day demands most serious consideration is materialistic monism, seeing that much of the scientific thought of modern times is materialistic. The materialist believes that matter is eternal and is eternally endowed with certain properties which account for all things in existence. What we call life and mind and spirit are but a subtle and inscrutable manifestation of matter. All higher forms of existence have come by evolution from lower forms. Whatever is evolved from matter must have been involved

<sup>1</sup> See the article on "Gnosticism," in the New International Encyclopædia.

in matter from the beginning. The properties of matter are inseparable from matter. Nevertheless, if considered in themselves alone, they constitute what may be called energy or force. Matter is indestructible and energy is indestructible. They had no beginning; they can have no end. They can undergo change almost without limit, but they can be neither created nor annihilated. Energy may take the form of any one of an indefinite number of forces; and these forces may be correlated into each other. Heat, motion, light, are but different forms of the one same force. The same is true of life, consciousness, feeling, thought.

The materialist, therefore, says there is no God; or if there be a God, then Energy, that infinite, inscrutable Force that pervades the universe and is inseparable from matter, is the one and only thing that can properly be called God. The "gods" of the world are all creations of the imagination, according to the materialist. Instead of saying that in the beginning God created man, it would be more in accord with the facts to say that in the beginning man created God—in the beginning, after nature evolved man, he began creating a God, and has been adding to and improving upon that first creation ever since. If anything is worthy to be called God, it is that which is uncreated and eternal and the source of all things in existence; and that one uncreated and eternal something is Matter. The nearest approach materialists make to recognising a God is to spell Matter and Energy and Force with capital letters. "A philosophy," says Dr. Newman Smyth, "which finds itself compelled to spell some common nouns with capitals in order that it may worship them, can hardly deny the moral necessity of some religion."

#### 4. *Pantheism*

While the materialist says there is no God and no such thing as spirit regarded as an entity separate and distinct from matter,—that matter is everything and everything is matter—the pantheist says that there is nothing in the universe but God, that God is everything and everything is God. Pantheism teaches that matter and all visible forms of creaturely ex-

istence are nothing but the visible existence form of God—*das habendige kleid*, the living garment of God, as Goethe, the great poet of pantheism, called it, following Spinoza, the great philosopher of pantheism. But God, according to pantheism, is not a person, not a He, but an infinite It, devoid of consciousness, a God who comes to consciousness only in finite existences. The infinite and eternal Something that abides in the universe is thus to be conceived of not as matter, but as spirit; and instead of spirit being a function and form of matter, matter is a form of spirit.

We may illustrate pantheism, with its denial of any ultimate distinction between God and the creature, between spirit and matter, soul and body, thus: Make a bottle out of ice by freezing water and then fill the ice-bottle with water. What is the difference between the bottle and the water in the bottle? A mere difference of form; melt the bottle and it becomes one with the water and runs back again into the ocean, the symbol of deity. As a cloud comes into view out of the invisible ether, takes on many forms, runs its course, and then disappears, returning into the invisible ether whence it came, so all forms of material and finite existence come from deity and go back again ultimately into deity. Absorption into deity is the end of all finite existence alike, whether it be good or bad—indeed, the distinction between things good and bad largely disappears under pantheism. The pantheist says it is impossible to conceive of the Infinite as a person. But in denying personality to God and individual immortality to man, pantheism robs man of all moral value, and God of everything that dignifies and ennobles him, and hence is practically no better than materialism.

“Nothing can possibly be less worthy of worship,” says Dr. W. H. P. Faunce, “than a being from whom are excluded by hypothesis all feeling, thinking, striving, intending, all love and hate, all experience warm and vital—a gigantic and incredible abstraction. We cannot yield our souls in affectionate surrender to the binomial theorem, or to a logical deduction, or to the Hegelian Absolute. Philosophy, in attempting to exalt God above all change, has depressed him below all living

reality.”<sup>1</sup> “Unless the Absolute knows what we know when we endure and wait, when we love and struggle, when we long and suffer, the Absolute in so far is less and not more than we are.”<sup>2</sup> “This whole false notion of the unchangeableness of God goes back to a metaphysically false and abandoned notion of an ever identical stuff or substance,” writes Dr. Henry Churchill King, “and should no longer be allowed to obscure our religious thinking and living.”<sup>3</sup>

Let us turn from these vague and unsatisfying answers to those answers which define God in terms of personality and intelligence.

### 5. *Deism*

Deism teaches that there is a God, and that he created the world; but created things do not need his presence and the exercise of his power in order to continue in existence and fulfil their functions. The material world is placed under immutable law; while man, the rational and moral free agent, is left to do as he wills. God sustains, according to deism, very much the same relation to the universe that the clock-maker does to his time-piece. Having made his clock and wound it up, he does not need to interfere with it, and the longer it can run without the maker's intervention the greater the evidence of wisdom and skill on the part of the maker. God, according to deism, has never wrought a miracle nor made a supernatural revelation to man. The only religion that is possible to man is natural religion. Man may and should reason from nature up to nature's God, and from human nature up to human nature's God. The only value of prayer is its subjective influence; it helps us to answer our own prayers; to pray helps us to become and be what we are praying to be, and to bring to pass what we are praying to have accomplished. If the Divine Being is a prayer-hearing God, he is at least not a prayer-answering God. The laws of nature constitute God's general providence; but there is no other personal and

<sup>1</sup> “What Does Christianity Mean?” p. 86.

<sup>2</sup> Josiah Royce, “The World and the Individual,” Vol. I, p. 364.

<sup>3</sup> “The Seeming Unreality of the Spiritual Life,” p. 73.

special providence than this, according to deism. God, say they, is too great, too distant, too transcendent a Being to concern himself with the details of creaturely existence. Many people to-day are Deists; they cannot escape the conviction that this universe owes its existence and its laws to a personal intelligent Being; but they do not believe, at least they in no way act as if they believe, that he has anything to do with its on going, except through its uniform laws and physical forces.

### 6. *Agnosticism*

And thus we are bewildered with the multitudinous conflicting and contradictory answers to the question, "Who is God?" Are we, therefore, forced to reject them all as unsatisfactory? Yes—we must reject all these. Shall we not say, then, that agnosticism is true—that there are so many gods that have been proved to be unreal and untrue that we do not know and cannot know anything about God? Indeed shall we not say, there is no real and true God—that God is after all only an unreal and imaginary Being? No; we cannot properly say this, because even agnosticism only disguises, it does not get rid of, God. It is, we must confess, not to be wondered at that agnostics, in support of their claim that God is and must ever remain the great unknown and unknowable, appeal to the fact that after all these ages of thinking and discussing about God, it is now as much a subject of inquiry as to who he is and what he is as it ever was. But, admitting this to be true, we may say it is also true that God is as much an object of faith and trust and love as he ever was—indeed more than he ever was. If God were such a Being that he did not awaken thought and inquiry and speculation and discussion, he would have to be a finite being so fully known and comprehended as to fall infinitely below what rational beings such as we are, demand, and must demand, in a God to command our reverence and adoration. What is the great Unknown and Unknowable affirmed by the logic and worshipped by the awe of the agnostic, asks Dr. Fairbairn, but "a confession that there are ideas which he will not name but from

which he cannot escape—ideas that he must disguise in order that he may reason from them and at least seem to be consistent with his negation of knowledge. These ideas from which man cannot escape, whether he be a scientist, or a philosopher, or a theologian, are born of religion, and forever cause religion to be born anew within him. They are the ideas of a being who cannot think without thinking God. This means that he can just as little choose to be religious as to be rational; that he is both, and both by the same necessity of nature."

Nor can materialists any more get rid of God than agnostics. They who deny the personality and spirituality of the divine Being are compelled to recognise in nature an inscrutable Force which takes on the significance and many of the qualities of deity, even though it be impersonal. We must count, therefore, among "the gods many and lords many" of mankind, the gods of materialism, of agnosticism and of pantheism, no less than those of fetishism, polytheism, dualism and deism.

Counterfeit coins always prove the existence of true money somewhere. If there were not coins of silver and gold somewhere that have real value there would be no counterfeits made. And the more counterfeits there are, the greater is the proof that there is a genuine and true coin somewhere, and that men know this fact. If there were not a genuine, real, true and living God somewhere in existence, men would not have made all these counterfeit gods—and these gods which are no gods are none the less counterfeits because religion may be, and doubtless often is, just as real and sincere an expression of the God-given religious instinct in man when found in the heathen as it is when found in the true worshipper of the true God. For while we believe that the heathen may be saved, and that many of them are saved, it is the one true and only God who saves them, even though they know him not, and not the non-real gods of their faith, which are but counterfeit substitutes for the true God. To be charitable towards the heathen who in his blindness bows down to wood and stone, and to recognise the possibility of the heathen being saved, must not be interpreted as a recognition or acknowledgement of any saving power in their gods. It simply means

that all men, even the heathen, are the children of the Heavenly Father, and that he judges all men with righteous judgment, in the light of their use or abuse of the standards and opportunities which they enjoy in life.

But it behooves those who have the genuine and true money to put the counterfeit out of existence. And in like manner it behooves us who have knowledge of the true God to put our divine coin, with God's own image and superscription on it, in circulation everywhere, that it may put out of existence the counterfeit substitutes that men have made to take its place. The Christian theistic idea of God is the only true coin of gold that can pass current without any discount in all the spiritual markets of the world where the standards of the assayers are at once rational and ethical.

## II

### THE THEISTIC CONCEPTION OF GOD

That Theism, which is the conception of God as a personal, spiritual Being, the Creator and Governor of the universe, furnishes a more rational and satisfactory answer to the question as to who God is than any of the many anti-theistic theories which we have considered, cannot fail to appear if the theistic conception of God and the grounds for believing it be adequately presented.

It is said that when the Westminster Assembly of divines was engaged in preparing their famous Catechism and Confession of Faith they found themselves unable to formulate a satisfactory answer to the question: "What is God?" In their perplexity it was suggested that they betake themselves to prayer for special divine guidance and help in their effort to give a worthy definition of the Divine Being. Whereupon the chairman called upon one of the youngest members present, a most deeply spiritual man, to lead in the supplication for divine assistance in the delicate and difficult task in which they were engaged. After a solemn and impressive silence of a few moments, the young divine began his invocation with a sentence somewhat like this: "O thou who art a Spirit infi-

nite, eternal and unchangeable in thy being, wisdom, power, holiness, goodness, and truth, we humbly seek thy presence and guidance in the work which we have undertaken in thy name." When he had finished his prayer, the answer had come; for some one immediately moved that the opening sentence of that prayer be made their answer to the question. The suggestion met with favour, and that opening sentence, after some alterations and additions, was adopted as the definition of God.

While we cannot claim divine inspiration for the Westminster definition or any other theistic answer to the question "What is God?"—and all theistic definitions of God have been made only after devout and serious prayer for divine guidance in the work undertaken—we do make the claim that the theistic conception of God is altogether rational, and, making due allowance for an essential margin for mysticism and speculation that must belong to all truth in the realm of religion and theology, it is both rationally and spiritually satisfying.

### *1. Belief in God Distinguished from Theories about God*

People frequently confuse belief in God with theories about God. The former may be and should be definite and positive, even when the latter, men's theories about God's nature and mode of activity, are characterised by a degree of uncertainty and by more or less of confusion. To ask questions as to who God is, what he is, and where he is, takes one necessarily beyond the bounds of clear and definite faith into the realm of speculative thought, where men who are equally intelligent and equally devout in their faith and trust in a divine Being may give different answers which reveal serious differences in their conceptions of God; and yet they may be not only equally religious but so thoroughly united in their common faith in God as to make worship at a common altar mutually pleasing and in a high degree spiritually edifying. That is to say, no matter how definite and clear and satisfying faith in a personal God may be, there is always left a wide range for speculative thought to roam in; and the fact that in this speculative

realm a certain vagueness and confusion are found should not be allowed to disturb unduly the calm confidence of the devout believer and worshipper, and cause him to believe that God is unknowable.

The history of theism reveals two stages in its progressive development,—that represented by Hebrew monotheism and that presented in the final and perfect revelation of Jesus Christ. It is to the Old and New Testament Scripture conception of God, then—and to the religious experience and life and consciousness developed in them and produced by them—that we must turn for the only answer that can satisfy us as to who and what and where God is. Hebrew monotheism and Christian theism constitute not two answers, but one historically developed and progressively perfected answer to man's age-old inquiry concerning God.

## *2. Hebrew Monotheism*

The most significant single sentence in all literature is the opening sentence of the Holy Scriptures, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," and the most significant word in this sentence is "God." Why did not the sacred writer explain the word; why did he not begin by proving that such a Being exists, and that he is possessed of such and such divine attributes? On the other hand, he begins by assuming a knowledge of God on the part of the reader—and this assumption is itself one of the most significant things in this opening sentence. As a matter of fact, the Bible, although it begins by assuming God's existence, does furnish in the course of its abundant and varied literature the best possible proof of his existence, and sets forth in the most luminous and satisfying manner the many divine attributes which enter into his being and define his nature. If, therefore, any one may be supposed to begin the reading of the Bible uncertain as to who and what is meant by "God" in the opening sentence, it is inconceivable that he should, in concluding the reading of it, be in any uncertainty as to the meaning and contents of this significant word as used in the Bible. When the opening sentence that declares that God in the beginning

created the heavens and the earth is followed by the further statement that he made one of his creatures, man, in his own image, we have a declaration which helps us to understand God in that it enables us to use our more perfect knowledge of man's nature to interpret and explain to us the divine nature.

The name for God which was peculiar to the Hebrews was Jehovah—or “Jahweh,” as modern Hebrew scholars say it ought to be designated in English. It is supposed to be derived from the Hebrew word for “to be”—Jehovah is the Being who *is*, who exists in himself, who causes things to be. Instead of deriving his name from the verb “to be,” it would, perhaps, be more in accord with the truth to say that the verb “to be” comes from him and would not have any existence but for his Being. He is the Being who causes all other beings to be. Another significant designation of Deity in the Hebrew Scriptures is that which refers to him as “the Holy One of Israel.” Holiness was perhaps the most characteristic of all the divine attributes in the Hebrew conception of God. But we have the highest authority for saying that the first and greatest of all the Hebrew commandments concerning God is this: “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.”

Of all the declarations made concerning God in the Old Testament this last statement was most of all pleasing to our Lord. He made it to be “the first and greatest commandment.”

In no way can we study to better advantage the conception of Deity that is characteristic of Hebrew monotheism than in the writings of the Old Testament prophets whose passion for righteousness found its inspiration in the God whom they worshipped and whom Matthew Arnold defined as “The Eternal, not ourselves, that makes for righteousness.”

According to the Hebrew prophets, God is that infinite and perfect Being who has existed from all eternity in the unity of his uncreated personality; that he is the Creator and Preserver of all things both visible and invisible, and the holy

and righteous Governor of all rational and moral beings. In attributing personality, spirituality, unity, and holiness to God, the Hebrew nation rose immeasurably above all the nations of antiquity, and thereby gave ethical and spiritual religion its highest and most perfect expression in the ancient world. This is Hebrew monotheism; and yet even this is an inadequate and incomplete answer to the question: "Who is God?" We must look to the New Testament and to Christ for the answer that will alone satisfy the head and the heart and the conscience of man.

### 3. *Christian Theism*

Hebrew monotheism is theism, but it is not Christian theism. In view of the fact that all our studies and discussions in these lectures are designed to lead us to a knowledge of that Divine Being who is revealed in the New Testament as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ—in view of the fact that our studies begin, continue and end with the Christian idea of God—we need here and now to give only a general statement of the Christian theistic conception of God. The chapters titled "Through the Bible to God" and "Through Christ to God" will present more fully the contents of the Christian revelation of God.

The last of the inspired writers, St. John, begins the prologue to his Gospel with a sentence only a little less significant than that which begins the Old Testament Scriptures—viz.: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made." This recognises a duality in the Deity—the existence of a second Person who not only was with God in the beginning, but was God. This metaphysical and philosophical term, "Word," is not, however, the best term through which to interpret the New Testament conception of God. "God is Spirit," "God is life," "God is light," "God is love." These sentences, found in the writings of St. John, furnish us with the terms through which we can best approach the study of the Christian doctrine of God—Father, Son, Spirit, life, light and love. While the

Old Testament had declared that God was a Being to be loved as well as to be feared and reverenced, it yet failed to make God altogether lovable. His personality and unity, his power and goodness and holiness, were all recognised and set forth as clearly in the Old Testament as was possible anywhere, but it was not until Christ came that God had an interpreter and revealer who could adequately set forth the infinite love of the divine nature and make him an altogether lovable Being. This he was able to do because in him as the Son dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father," he said to Philip; and again he said, "And no man knoweth the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him." Of all Christ's parables, none has so taken hold upon the heart of the whole world as the parable of the prodigal son; but the greatness of that parable is not found in the penitential return of the prodigal to his home, but rather in the greatness and tenderness of the father's love for his penitent child, and in the fact that it is meant to reveal to us the depth of love in the Father-heart of God.

One of the most fundamental of Christ's declarations concerning God, that uttered to the woman of Samaria at Jacob's well—"God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth"—is something more than a reaffirming of the fact of God's spirituality as taught in the Old Testament. Christ revealed the Holy Spirit as a third person in the Godhead and declared that through him his own redeeming work was to be carried on in the salvation of individuals and the evangelisation of the world. This he did while he was yet in the flesh. But not until the day of Pentecost is come do we have Christ's full answer to the question: "Who is God?" The Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, three in One and One in three, represents the fulness of the Godhead as revealed in and through Christ. A triune God may transcend but does not contradict the finite reason of man. If the Trinity of the Godhead be an eternal challenge to the mind, taxing man's reason and faith to the utmost, it is also an eternal answer to the heart, satisfying as no other doctrine of deity ever has or can the deepest cravings of the human soul.

All other religions represent man as seeking an indifferent God, and leave him crying out to God and getting no answer but the echo of his cry. The Christian religion reveals a God of infinite wisdom, holiness, and love, seeking all men as a father seeks his wandering child. The paths that lead to God are paths which the Son of God and the Spirit of God are ever travelling in search of those who are in search of their God and Father.

#### 4. *Theistic Dualism*

There is a form of Theistic Dualism more rational and tenable than that of Gnosticism, which perhaps deserves to be stated here. This form of dualism does not differ from prevalent theism in its view of God except in saying that he is not the Creator of matter—that is to say, God is the one and only supreme, uncreated, personal Spirit who has existed from all eternity. But matter also, according to this view, is eternal and has always existed just as it now exists so far as its essential attributes and properties are concerned. Matter, however, with all its inherent properties, is and always has been the instrument and tool of Spirit. Personal spirit, possessed of mind and will, uses, directs and controls matter for the accomplishment of rational and moral ends. What God creates, therefore, is not matter but spirit, finite spirit. The spirits that he creates bear his image; he is the Father of spirits. He governs the world in the interest of spirits. "Spirit comes to itself," as Dr. Temple has said, "through taking possession of matter and using it." That is what matter exists for—to be used by spirit, and always has existed to serve this purpose. Plato was a theistic dualist and believed in the eternity of matter, holding that it was plastic material in the hands of God and of created spirits for the accomplishment of the ends and purposes of intelligence.

Apart from affirming that matter, with all its properties and limitations, is as eternal as time and space and God, theistic Dualism detracts nothing from the Christian doctrine of God, and adds nothing to the properties or functions of matter. Theistic dualists believe that the co- eternity of spirit

and matter is a conception not unworthy either of philosophy or of theology, and that it furnishes a theory of the universe that would at least lessen if it did not eliminate the difficulties which many have in reconciling the reign of law in the physical world with the reign of mind and will in the realm of spirit. If theistic Dualism were accepted in philosophy as true, there would, it is claimed, be no conflict to settle between science and religion. But the trend of modern theistic philosophy is in quite an opposite direction from dualism.

### *5. Traditional and Modern Forms of Theism*

Theistic thought has undergone a change in recent years in its interpretation of God's relation to and government of the world. Traditional theology in its conception of God had much in common with deism. It conceived of the world as created by a personal God and placed under the reign of natural laws as "secondary causes," after which God removed himself, so to speak, to his dwelling place, which was separate and apart, and more or less distant, from the world. So far traditional theology was in accord with deism. But it differed with and from deism in saying that God was not only an observant and ever-interested spectator of what was going on in the world, but held himself ready to "come down" from heaven, his dwelling place, in answer to the prayers of men—or whenever, in the observing of human affairs, he found it wise to interfere with the ordinary operations of nature's laws and work miracles or "special providences." These special miraculous interventions of his power in the realm of natural law, and in the realm of human free agency in the form of answers to prayer and special providences, were looked upon as necessary in order to prove his existence and his presence and power in the government of the world. And these special visitations were thought to be more significant and impressive by the fact that he "came down" from a more or less distant dwelling place in the heavens to accomplish these displays of his power on the earth. This traditional anthropomorphic type of theism placed its chief emphasis upon the transcendence of God—upon his separateness from our world, his aloof-

ness, his "above-ness"—and might not improperly be designated as deistic theism.

Wherein now, let us ask, does modern Christian theism, as represented by its best interpreters and exponents, differ from this deistic theism of traditional theology? We answer, by transferring the whole emphasis in its conception of God's relation to the world from the transcendence to the immanence of the divine Power that not only created the world but sustains it by a relationship so essential and ceaseless that the world could no more continue without God than it could have begun to be without him. This transference of the emphasis from the transcendence to the immanence of God could not fail to result in a reinterpretation of God and of nature and the supernatural.

Seeing that much depends upon our understanding this doctrine of the Divine Immanence, if we are going to view God and nature with the eye of a modern Christian theist, it is necessary that we keep clearly in mind the points wherein pantheism, deism and deistic theism differ from this modern form of theism. It will be recalled, therefore, that pantheism affirms God's immanence, but denies his transcendence, while deism affirms his transcendence, but denies his immanence. But Christian theism teaches that God is both transcendent and immanent. By the term transcendence, when applied to God, is meant that the Divine Being is a person, separate and distinct from nature and above nature—"nature" being used here in its largest significance as including all created things. By the Divine Immanence is meant that God is in nature as well as over nature, and that the continuance of nature is as directly and immediately dependent upon him as is the origin of nature—indeed, by some, God's preservation of the created universe is defined as an act of "continuous creation." By the Divine Immanence is meant something more than omnipresence, which term, in itself alone, does not affirm any causal relation between God and the thing to which he is present, whereas the term immanence does affirm such causal relation.

By asserting the Divine Immanence, therefore, as expressing

the mode of God's providential efficiency, we affirm that all created things are dependent upon him for continued existence, that the laws of nature have no efficiency apart from their Creator and Preserver, that God is to be sought and seen in all forms and phases of creaturely existence, in the natural as well as the supernatural and miraculous, that he is not only omnipresent but always and everywhere active both in the natural and the spiritual world, and that without him neither the material atom, nor the living organism, nor the rational soul, nor the vast universe of worlds, could have any being. He not only created all things, but "by him all things consist," that is, by him all things are preserved in being. God's existence is not dependent upon the existence of anything else; but everything that exists is dependent upon him not only for its origin but for its continuance in being. "In him we live and move and have our being"—and in him, in some true sense, all things have their being.

## III

## REINTERPRETING GOD

I. *Enlarging Visions of God*

Getting a vision of God is like getting a vision of the heavens above us and of the atoms of matter—of the infinite and of the infinitesimal—around about us. For a long time men gazed at the heavens and saw only what their natural vision revealed—some six or seven thousand stars—and this was the measure of their universe. And then they invented the magnifying lens, and, looking through it at the heavens, they found that instead of six thousand stars there were sixty thousand to be seen, and then by scientific study they were able to make a more powerful lens that revealed a yet larger number of stars; and with each new added power to the lens the universe grew larger and larger, until now the number of visible worlds is numbered by millions—for the white light of the Milky Way is now seen to be an innumerable multitude of stars. And at the same time the lens was being

developed to reveal the worlds that light up the infinite stellar spaces another improved magnifying glass with a different lens was developed that revealed particles of matter so fine and small that hitherto no eye had seen them. And with each new added power to the magnifying glass this world of minute things has grown until now the mind is almost appalled at the vision of the infinitesimal minuteness of matter.

In like manner our vision of God has been enlarged both extensively and intensively. As experience and history have increased the power of spiritual vision our knowledge of God has continually increased and we have revelations of the greatness of God and of his purposes far beyond what our fathers had or could have. And we find that more than they ever could see, his power and love and care enter into the minutest details of our life—that he is as truly in the smallest affairs of individual life as he is in the greatest affairs of nations and empires, and the vast universe. There is no limitation set to the increase of our knowledge concerning God. The revelations of the telescope and of the microscope made necessary new text books in astronomy and in physics; and the ever increasing experience of men with God and the larger observation of his activity both in nature and in history ought to make re-interpretations of him necessary. It would be a sad reflection upon us, indeed it would be an indictment of the genuineness of our experience with God, if we should remain forever content with the conceptions of God and with the interpretations of him which satisfied our fathers in ages now long past.

## *2. The Faith that Abides While Faiths Change*

The reason why the Christian faith lives from age to age is because it is not only capable of reinterpretation but demands reinterpretation, and grows greater and more convincing every time it is truly interpreted. The reinterpretation of Christianity is in a sense always going on, though this is less manifest in some ages than others. I am persuaded that the day is not far distant when the fermenting wine of thought and faith pent up within the present old, unyielding wineskins

of the historic creeds will burst their bottles, unless we provide new bottles for the new wine.

God ought to be a greater God to us than he was to the Hebrew prophets or to the early Christian fathers. He has wrought wonders in the world since these ancient believers lived and died, and God ought to mean more to us than to them, and our conception and interpretation of him ought to bring him nearer to us. This closer and deeper experience with God ought to make him more real to us; and this is really the final test of the correctness of our answer to the questions we have been asking as to who he is, what he is, and where he is:—Is our conception of God reinforced by reality in experience and by correspondingly lofty types of manhood and womanhood in those who have this conception?

Religions die, but religion lives in spite of their death. Indeed, religion lives because religions die. If a religion will not suffer itself to be reinterpreted,—if it cannot be reinterpreted without destroying it,—it will die, and ought to die, in order that religion may live; for, as the human race progresses intellectually and morally, it will demand a different, and ever higher and better expression of religious faith.

Churches die, but the Church lives; and the Church lives because churches die. If there be churches that will not change, that cannot adapt themselves to new conditions and to the new ways of thinking that are an essential accompaniment of all human progress, they will die, and ought to die; and because of their death, the Church will live—live and grow.

Creeds die and pass away; but faith lives; and faith lives because creeds die and pass away. If creeds cannot change they will die and ought to die and pass away, and this in order that faith may live. Every successful revision of a creed that is out of date is an aid to faith in God and Christ. If it be true that “to doubt at the right place and at the right time is the best cure for doubt,” then is it also true that to dogmatise at the wrong place and in the wrong manner—to insist on men believing what they will not believe and cannot believe—is the surest road to rational rebellion and religious scepticism. This is why creed-revisers are not creed destroyers but creed-savers.

The man who first criticised the traditional interpretation of the Mosaic account of creation as six literal days, and argued that the days must refer to periods or geologic days, was accused of trying to destroy faith in the Bible; but it turned out that he was not destroying faith in the Bible, but saving it. Reinterpretations of God and the Bible may modify and destroy old interpretations, but they do not destroy faith in God or the Bible itself,—they save and enrich and strengthen faith in that which liveth and abideth forever.

The gods of men die and pass away, but God lives on; and God lives because the gods of men die. If they had not died in the past after having served their day and generation, God would be dead. Faith in God would have died out of the minds of rational and cultured men and civilised nations if Jupiter, and Juno, and Mars and Minerva; Isis and Osiris, Marduk and Ishtar, Baal and Dagon, and Chemosh had not died long ago. It was because such gods as they were died, and got out of the way, that the path that leads to the only true and living God was cleared, that men might walk in it. This means, to adapt to our uses the poet's familiar lines, that

These gods of men all had their day;  
 They had their day and ceased to be—  
 They were but broken lights of Thee,  
 And Thou, O God, art more than they.

#### IV

#### WHERE IS GOD?

##### 1. *God's Dwelling Place*

The brightest star in the Pleiades is the one called Alcyone. The astronomers tell us that all the suns and stars in the universe, together with their "solar systems," are in motion, and they used to tell us that they all seem to be revolving around this radiant and beautiful star as a centre. They are not as certain of this now, I believe, as they once were, but I remember hearing a teacher of astronomy say in my college days, on the assumption that Alcyone was at the centre of the universe, that

he thought that Heaven and the throne of God must be located on that star. The statement appealed powerfully to my boyish imagination and fitted well into the materialistic ideas I formed in my childhood as to God's being up in heaven, and having his home and his throne up there, and of his coming down ever and anon from Heaven to earth. Surely the Christian Heaven, I thought, must be up in the heavens that appear so glorious every starry night. God had to be in some one place—and what dwelling place could be more beautiful than the Pleiades, with its seven radiant stars to light it? Did not Elijah and Christ both ascend into this same starry heaven when they left the earth and went to God? The suggestion is as beautiful as it is fanciful; but it vanishes into less than thin air and becomes of even less value theologically than it is as a scientific suggestion when, in studying the nature of Spirit, both finite and infinite, we are compelled to give up materialistic ideas of spirit and such anthropomorphic representations of God as are involved in this suggestion as to God's geographical dwelling place. We cannot, therefore, answer the question as to where God is by making even this brightest of the Pleiades to be his place of abode.

## *2. God's Omnipresence and Immanence*

Both reason and revelations compel us to think of God as omnipresent and immanent. By virtue of his omnipresence every point and every object in infinite space may be said to be equally present to him, and he is at one and the same time in perfect and immediate communication with every conscious, rational spirit in infinite space. By virtue of his immanence he is everywhere and all the time active, and what we call the laws of nature and of life are but an expression of his power and ceaseless activity.

"God's omnipresence as a doctrine of religion," says Dr. Gwatkin, "simply means that his action is not hindered by distance like ours, but is as direct in any one place as in any other; this immanence means, further, that the common works of nature are as truly divine acts as anything we can imagine done by a miracle."

"As living spirits," says Dr. R. H. Relton, "we infinitely transcend our material bodies in every particle of which we immanently dwell. What we are to our bodies, that God is to the whole creation—immanent in the whole, and in every minutest part, yet transcendent above the whole as the sole condition of indwelling in any part." "What we mean when we say that there is a spiritual power behind the spiritual universe, is, that there is behind this universe something akin to the spirit in ourselves."

### 3. *God's Real and Abiding Presence*

But in answering the question, "Where is God?" our concern is not to discover his geographical dwelling place in space, nor his "real presence" in the holy sacramental grail, nor yet to furnish a metaphysical argument to prove a spirit's independence of space, but our concern is to emphasise the ever present possibility of finding God in experiencing a satisfying sense of his spiritual presence. Christ told the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well how and where to find God, and his words to her the whole world was, as it were, waiting to hear. When our Lord said, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto me," he was telling where and how to find him. When he said of waiting and worshipping souls, gathered together for meditation and prayer, after seeking and serving their fellow men, that "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them," he was telling how and where he is to be found by each and every sincere seeker after God. Air cannot so surely and quickly find the open door to a vacuum and rush in and fill it, as God is to find and enter into and fill the soul that opens to him the door of a loving heart, that has proved its love by sympathetic and self-sacrificing service to one's fellow men. We do not therefore have to wait until we get to the end of life's journey to find the dwelling place of God and to dwell with him. The pure in heart see God and dwell in the sunshine of his presence not simply hereafter in heaven, but here and now on the earth.

And yet there is surely a sense in which the vision of God

and fellowship with him will be more real and more satisfying when the Christian pilgrim's eyes are no longer veiled in flesh, but, being in the very presence of the hitherto invisible God, he looks upon him face to face, and knows him even as he is known by him.

I sought the Lord in sun and stars,  
And where the wild seas roll,  
And found him not. As mute I stood,  
Fear overwhelmed my soul;  
But when I gave to one in need  
I found the Lord of Love indeed.

I sought the Lord in lore of books,  
In charts of science skill;  
They left me orphaned as before—  
His love eluded still;  
Then in despair I breathed a prayer;  
The Lord of Love was standing there!

—THOMAS CURTIS CLARK.

### CHAPTER THREE

## RELIGION AND RELIGIONS AS RELATED TO GOD



## CHAPTER THREE

### RELIGION AND RELIGIONS AS RELATED TO GOD

#### I

##### WHAT IS RELIGION?

Having answered the question "Who is God?", it is fitting that we ask and answer briefly the question, "What is Religion?", for God and religion sustain to each other such a vital relation that neither can be understood or explained without a knowledge of the other. Religion has found expression in the religions of the world, and we can understand religion only by understanding something of the religions that enshrine it and constitute its outward and visible expression. Religion may be defined in its subjective aspect as man's attitude toward and relation to the Divine Being, or the supernatural and superhuman Powers of the universe—or what are supposed by the worshipper to be such—and, objectively, as the visible methods and forms employed to express that attitude and relationship of men to the divine Being. We wish to consider religion and the religions of the world, as constituting for mankind a divinely provided pathway to God.

##### *I. The Origin of Religion*

There are three theories as to the origin of religion—that of traditional theology, inherited by us all and familiar to us all, which holds that religion started in a perfect and divine, though primitive, form with the first man and woman, who were created physically, intellectually, and morally perfect by their Maker. The second theory is that of materialistic and atheistic evolution which holds that religion is the superstitious faith of primitive savages born of fear, of illusion and delusion, and that it will disappear as soon as evolution has carried the development of the human race to a state where

their beliefs will be determined by intelligence and reason rather than by fear, superstition and imagination. I need not dwell upon either of these: not upon the first, because it is perfectly familiar to all of us as the inherited and long prevalent faith of the Christian Church; and not upon the second because it belongs to a conception of the universe to which I shall give no consideration in this volume further than to state what it is at the proper place, and to discredit it.

But the third view, that held by those who believe both in a personal God and in evolution as the method by which religion and the religions of the world have come to be what they are, seeing that it is held by a number of Christian believers which is not only large but constantly increasing, deserves to be stated, and to be stated by one who believes in it.

Professor Sanday, the eminent theologian and scholar of Oxford, England, describes the primitive origin of religion and the process of its gradual development into higher forms, as follows in his monograph on "Natural and Revealed Religion":

"The stage of religion begins at that point in the evolution of the race where there grows up a sense or impression of a Something outside which co-operates with or thwarts the impulses or desires from within. At first the idea of this Something was very vague. Men looked about them to see if they could identify it in anything near them that they could hear or see. The multitude of objects confused them. But it was natural that they should guess at something of unusual shape, or that gave forth an unusual sound, or that in some way was weird and strange. It was in this way that primitive man arrived at Fetishism or Totemism. Fetishism would take the form of some prominent and curious stump or stone. Totemism would take the form of some uncanny beast or bird or reptile. Totemism might give place to animal-worship on a larger scale, as the ancient world was full of fierce and savage beasts which were formidable enemies of man.

"Meantime other causes would be at work. The images that float before the mind in dreams would be the first to suggest the idea of spirits. . . . Such mental processes as

these would explain the rise of different kinds of Animism. One of the most distinctive and highest forms of Animism was ancestor-worship, which was very widespread in remote antiquity. By the time we have come to ancestor-worship, however, we are really entering upon a higher region in the realm of religion. Anthropomorphism was a distinct advance upon animal-worship. To invest the idea of deity with the qualities of men was at least better than to invest it with qualities of lower animals. By this time the human mind had begun to climb the staircase of the ideal. The abstract idea of deity was being formed; and the step from the abstract to the spiritual idea was not so very long. Before this point has been reached, however, we are already conscious of a great widening of the horizon. The worship of the greater Powers of Nature must stand high in the scale of religious values."

## *2. Religion as Interpreted by Theistic Evolutionists*

The author of the following paragraphs was a believer in the scientific doctrine of evolution, but he was also, and even more if anything, a believer in "the everlasting reality of religion." I say "even more" because he believed that the fact of religion, the universality of man's outgoing after and worship of God, is so manifest, and so potent and persistent, that if the doctrine of evolution cannot make room for it, and recognise it, and adjust itself to it as a fact, then so much the worse for evolution—it must be given up as a theory for explaining the development of our world. It is well for us to have set before us statements that will show what a representative evolutionist thinks of religion. However obscure, humble and lowly he may conceive its origin, no one can have a higher estimate of its influence and end in the human race than does John Fiske. He says:

"None can deny that religion is the largest and most ubiquitous fact connected with the existence of mankind upon the earth. Now, if the relation thus established in the morning twilight of man's existence between the human soul and a world invisible and immaterial is a relation of which only the subjective term is real and the objective term is nonexistent,

then, I say, it is something utterly without precedent in the whole history of creation. All the analogies of evolution, so far as we have yet been able to decipher it, are overwhelmingly against any such supposition. To suppose that through countless ages from the seaweed up to man, the progress of life was achieved through adjustments to external realities, but that then the method was all at once changed and throughout a vast province of evolution the end was secured through adjustment to external nonrealities, is to do sheer violence to logic and to common sense. . . . All the analogies of nature fairly shout against the assumption of such a breach of continuity between the evolution of man and all previous evolution. So far as our knowledge of nature goes, the whole momentum of it carries us onward to the conclusion that the unseen world, as the objective term in a relation of fundamental importance that has co-existed with the whole career of mankind, has a real existence; and it is but following out the analogy to regard that unseen world as the theatre where the ethical process is destined to reach its full consummation. The lesson of evolution is that through all these weary ages the human soul has not been cherishing in religion a delusive phantom, but in spite of seemingly endless groping and stumbling it has been rising to the recognition of its essential kinship with the ever-living God. Of all the implications of the doctrine of evolution with regard to man, I believe the very deepest and strongest to be that which asserts the everlasting reality of religion. Our common-sense argument puts the scientific presumption entirely and decisively on the side of God and religion and against all atheistic and materialistic explanations of the universe. The infinite and eternal Power that is manifested in every pulsation of the universe is none other than the living God."

### *3. The Ubiquity and Influence of Religion in History*

The primitive appearance and all dominating influence of religion in the human race is the outstanding fact of history. Whether it be a thing of magic or superstition, as it is among savage tribes, or the crown of glory of a people as it is among the most civilised and cultured nations of the earth where it finds its most perfect expression in the highest ethical charac-

ter, it is always and everywhere a potent force, generally for good, though sometimes the good it does is not unmixed with evil.

The ubiquity of religion with its all-penetrative and commanding action means not simply that man possesses religion, but that it possesses him, and is the mother of all his order, all his art and all his architectonic ideas. Till religion, therefore, is explained, says Dr. Fairbairn, man is inexplicable, and only as religion is made pure and strong can man be made perfect. Religion is so essential to man that he cannot escape from it. It besets him behind and before, penetrates him, holds him even against his will. It comes into being without any man willing it, or any man making it; and as it began so it continues. In hours of revolt individual men may will to have nothing to do with religion; but nature and instinct are stronger than will, and religion in some form both of idea and usage inevitably returns.

It is in his religion that man most truly knows himself to be a man, and through religion that he realises his manhood. His first attempts to interpret nature are governed by religious ideas, and from his last attempts they are inseparable. He must, because he is rational, think, and what is the thought of a rational being but a factor which relates him to the Infinite and the Eternal. Language in all its terms is instinct with religious feeling. In theology, which is the thought of God, philosophy begins, and in theology science ends. Religion is as it were, so built into man's nature as to be the very heart of his being. Religion then being the imperial idea of all our being and all our thinking, the regulative principle in human conduct, the architectonic force in society and the most commanding single influence in history, it follows that he who can create its most perfect form is the supreme benefactor of the human race—the foremost person not only in the world's religions but in all history.<sup>1</sup>

To say all this is to bring us into His presence who called

<sup>1</sup> See Fairbairn's "Philosophy of the Christian Religion," from which most of these luminous statements concerning the nature and influence of religion have been taken—but not without such freedom and changes in form and phraseology as make it seem best not to use quotation marks.

himself the Son of Man, but whom others adoringly called the Son of God. And that which more than anything else led men to so designate him was the interpretation and revelation which he brought to men of God.

## II

## HEATHEN SEEKERS AFTER GOD

Aristotle taught that the real nature of anything which undergoes a process of development is not what it is at the beginning, but what it becomes after the idea of its nature is fully developed and realised. Quite the opposite of this was the theory of Herbert Spencer with regard to religion in that he maintained that if we are to discover the true nature of religion, we must go back to primitive man and the benighted savage. If Herbert Spencer is right we are to explain religion as a superstition and delusion. If Aristotle is right we must judge religion as to what it is and was meant to be by that highest development and finest expression of it that we find in Christianity.

*i. The Science of Comparative Religion*

For a long time it was customary to explain heathen religions one and all as the thoughts and works of those who loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil, as the creations of ungodly and wicked men who did not wish to retain the knowledge of the true and holy God in their minds because he condemned them; and they therefore made their gods like unto themselves.<sup>1</sup> These Scripture statements made with reference to some heathen have been applied to all heathens. The religions of the heathen world, being thus interpreted as of satanic-human rather than divine-human origin, were regarded as the faiths and delusions and spiritual vagaries of those who were wilfully and wickedly travelling the paths that lead not towards but away from the true God. But these various religions of the world are now almost universally regarded by students of Comparative Religion as the honest

<sup>1</sup> Romans 1:18-32.

though blind gropings after God of those who, having lost the true path, are yet trying to follow the best light they have, even though that light be as darkness when compared with the knowledge of God possessed by those who have learned from Christ who God is and what he is like. The former attitude towards heathen religions was based on the assumption that originally there was but one religion, that it was true and divine and recognised by all as such; and that it was man's fallen and sinful condition that led to the utter degradation of religion. The present attitude towards these religions is based on the supposition that the movement of mankind generally in its religious history has been in the opposite direction, that it has been upwards from the lower to something higher and better, and through the higher to the highest—which is the Christian religion with its conception of the divine Being as a holy and loving Father.<sup>1</sup>

Following Aristotle rather than Herbert Spencer, let us study religion as it has found expression in some of the great religions of the world and judge each of them by what it is, or seems to be, taken at its best, rather than at its worst. The former method of interpreting the heathen religions which prevailed among Christian theologians was scarcely less unjust to them than was Herbert Spencer's method unjust to religion generally; this was to take the heathen religions at their worst, in their grossest forms and most objectionable features, but to take Christianity in its highest and best expression. By so doing it was easy to show that the position then maintained was true, namely, that all heathen religions were evil and only evil continually, were the offspring of the devil and an abomination to God, while the Christian religion alone came from God and is therefore wholly good and altogether true.

No one who has studied the modern science of Comparative Religions can fail to note the change in attitude towards heathen religions to which we have referred. Thus Professor E. D. Soper of Northwestern University says:

<sup>1</sup> See F. B. Jevons, "Introduction to the Study of Comparative Religion," pp. 18, 24, 25.

"The easy way in which through many centuries of history the theologians accounted for the non-Christian religions of the world was to refer them to the devil as the author. This was a simple solution of a difficult problem, and it was adopted by the Christian Church generally until within the past century; but it was too simple to be permanently convincing and has therefore generally been discarded. No Christian who is familiar with modern Christian thought and in sympathy with its tendencies can be indifferent to the religion of any people, or blind to anything whatsoever that may be good and true in it, but he must be able to combine in his own faith two convictions. The first is the fundamental Christian conviction that Christianity is the only faith adequate to meet the needs of all men. Christianity as a propagating, conquering faith would have ceased to exist long ago but for this conviction. A religion lives and grows by the intensity of its belief in its own peculiar worth and power. 'There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.'

"But with this conviction, another must be held to save the belief just expressed from becoming exclusive and intolerant and from taking the position that, as Christianity is the only true faith, so all others must be false and ought to be harried to death as soon as possible. The true Christian attitude, however, is quite different; but it recognises that the word 'false' is not the proper word to use with reference to these religions. Reserving that word for the sordid and insincere, for the unworthy and base among the adherents of any religion, Christianity included, the true Christian cannot but look upon all religions as the expression of man's longing for God and as the method by which, following the best light he has, he attempts to find God and obtain his blessing."<sup>1</sup>

Among the causes that have brought about this change in attitude towards the so-called heathen religions, nothing, strange to say, has been so potent as the study of ancient history and especially of the ancient religions, in the light of new archæological discoveries. Of the very highest value, historical, literary and religious is the rich and large contribution

<sup>1</sup> See "The Religions of Mankind," pp. 15, 16, 30, which has been liberally drawn upon for the sentiments and sentences found in these two paragraphs.

which archaeology has made to the history of religion in ancient Greece, Babylonia, Persia and Egypt, whose inhabitants were among the most deeply religious people in the world, as shown by their monuments. We use the religions of these four peoples as examples and illustrations in our study of heathen religions for two reasons: First, they were co-extant with the religion of the Old Testament, and second, it is in these countries that archaeologists have made their most important discoveries.

## 2. *The Religions of Ancient Babylonia and Persia*

To quote the prayers and hymns of some of the most devout of these ancient worshippers will almost force us to take back much that we have said in criticism of polytheism and compel us to discriminate more carefully and say that, in spite of many crude, grotesque and debasing features in the polytheism of Babylonia and Egypt, there were, as we now know, other elements of a moral and spiritual nature that can be compared only with the finer spiritual elements of the Old Testament Psalms and the Hebrew prophets. We justify this statement by quotations.

When Nebuchadnezzar ascended the throne he addressed the following prayer to his god.<sup>1</sup>

“O eternal Ruler! Lord of the universe!  
 Grant that the life of the king whom thou lovest,  
 Whose name thou hast called, exalting him to the throne,  
 May flourish as seems good to thee.  
 Guide him in the path of righteousness.  
 I am the ruler who obeys thee, the creature of thy hands.  
 It is thou who hast created me,  
 Thou who hast entrusted to me the sovereignty over mankind.  
 According to thy mercy, O Lord, which thou hast bestowed  
 upon all,  
 Cause me to love thy supreme rule.  
 Implant the fear of thy divinity in my heart.  
 Grant to me whatsoever may seem good before thee,  
 Since it is thou that dost control my life.”

<sup>1</sup> The translations here given are taken from Boscawen.

It is doubtful if Solomon in all his wisdom has much surpassed this prayer—or David, indeed, or any other psalmist or prophet. We are not in the habit of thinking that the heathen kings who are described in the Old Testament as the enemies of God and man were accustomed to pray such prayers as this; and yet this prayer was addressed to the great god Marduk, and not to Jehovah, whom Nebuchadnezzar and his contemporaries regarded simply as Israel's God. Nebuchadnezzar was one of the most pious of the many heathen kings whom the Old Testament mentions. These kings, doubtless, were all as religious in their way as were the kings of Israel and Judah, and perhaps as true to their gods and their ideas of devotion. Nebuchadnezzar's inscriptions are almost invariably closed with a prayer, and some of the noblest of these prayers, as to diction and elevation of thought, are offered at the dedication of temples which he had either built or restored. Thus—

“O great Lord, upon entering joyfully into this thy glorious temple,  
Look with favour upon thy precious handiwork.  
Mercy toward me be thy command;  
Through thy righteous order may I have abundance of strength.  
Long life and a firm throne grant me.  
May my rule last forever!  
With a righteous sceptre of blissful rulership,  
With a legitimate staff, bringing salvation to mankind, adorn my  
sovereignty forever.”

King Cyrus, according to the discoveries of modern archæology was a more than ordinarily religious ruler. The clay cylinders which bear his name tell the story not only of his valorous deeds, but also how he was blessed by the gods in reward for piety and devotion. They show that he regarded himself as the man of destiny. One of the inscriptions reads thus, “He [Merodach, his god] sought for, he found him, yea, he sought out an upright prince, after his own heart, *whom he took by his hand*, Cyrus, king of the city of Anshan; *he called his name*; to the sovereignty of the whole world *he called him by name*. Merodach, the great lord, the guardian of his people, beheld with joy the blessed deeds and his up-

right heart; like a friend and helper *he marched at his side.*" Cyrus was a polytheist, and had no disposition to degrade and dethrone the gods of the peoples whom he conquered. Moreover, his uniform policy as a conqueror was to restore exiled and captive peoples to their own lands. (See Ezra i. 2.) One of his inscriptions reads, "All of their peoples I gathered together and restored to their own dwelling places." Compare with these inscriptions the statements found in the forty-fifth chapter of Isaiah, "Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, *whose right hand I have holden*, to subdue nations before him. . . . *I will go before thee*, and make the crooked places straight. . . . I, the Lord, which *call thee by thy name*, am the God of Israel. For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me." The parallelisms here found are certainly remarkable. Are they accidental, or was there some connection between these writings? Were the Gods of Cyrus and of "second" Isaiah as far apart as we have been taught to think?

Among the sacred relics of the Orient which archaeology has brought to light are found many penitential psalms uttered by the heathen in the worship of their gods. This is a specimen:

"I, thy servant, full of sighs, call upon thee;  
 The fervent prayer of him who has sinned do thou accept.  
 If thou lookest upon a man, that man lives.  
 Besides thee, there is no guiding deity.  
 I implore thee to look upon me and hear my sighs.  
 The sin that I have committed I know not.  
 Known or unknown god, my sins are many; great are my  
 transgressions.

Full of woe, I grovel in the dust without looking up.  
 To my merciful God I turn, speaking with sighs.  
 O Lord, look upon me; accept my lament.

O Lord, do not cast aside thy servant overflowing with  
 tears: take him by the hand.  
 The sin I have committed change to mercy.  
 The wrong I have done, may the wind carry off.

Tear asunder my many transgressions as a garment.  
 My god, my sins are seven times seven: forgive me my sins.  
 My goddess, my sins are seven times seven; forgive me my sins.  
 Known or unknown god, my sins are seven times seven, forgive me my sins.  
 Known or unknown goddess, my sins are seven times seven, forgive me my sins.  
 Forgive me my sins, and I will humble myself before thee.  
 May thy heart be glad (pacified) as the heart of a mother who has given birth; as that of a father who has begotten a child.

Instead of food, I eat bitter tears;  
 Instead of date-wine, I drink the waters of misery.  
 For my drink I have bitter waters.  
 Instead of clothes, I am enveloped in sin.  
 O my god, who art angry with me, accept my prayer.  
 O Lord, in mercy and compassion look upon me;  
 O thou who guidest the span of life against the encroachments of death, hear my prayer.

May my sins be forgiven, may my transgressions be blotted out.  
 May the bond be loosened and the chain broken.  
 May the seven winds carry off my sighs.  
 Let me tear away my iniquity, and let the birds carry it to heaven.  
 Let the fishes take off my misfortune, and the stream bear it far away.  
 May the beasts of the field take it away from me.  
 The flowing waters, may they wash me clean.  
 Let me be pure like the sheen of gold.  
 As a ring of precious stone, may I be precious before thee.  
 Remove my iniquity, save my soul.  
 Thy temple court will I watch, thy image will I set up."

Until archæology began to yield up its secrets, we certainly have not been accustomed to think of the heathen as uttering such devout and tender psalms of penitence as these. It is not strange that a race of people who worshipped the Divine

Being in such prayers as the above could send forth an Abraham to bless the world and become the father of the faithful.

### 3. *The Religion of Ancient Egypt*

Not less remarkable are the results of archæological discovery in Egypt. Take for instance the hymns of adoration addressed by Amenhotep IV (who reigned from 1375 to 1358, B.C.) which are found on the recently unearthed tablets of Tell-el-Amarna and which have been translated by Dr. J. H. Breasted of Chicago University, whose scholarly and scientific work in archæology has made the student world his debtor. Take the following addressed to Aton, the Sun-God (also called Re) whom Amenhotep worshipped:

O Living Aton, Beginning of life,  
 Thy dawning is beautiful in the horizon of the sky.  
 When thou risest in the eastern horizon,  
 Thou fillest every land with thy beauty.  
 Thou art beautiful, great, glittering, high above every land,  
 Thy rays compass the lands, even all that thou hast made.  
 Thou art Re, and thou carriest them all away captive;  
 Thou bindest them by thy love.

O sole God whose powers no other posseseth,  
 How manifold are thy works;  
 Thou didst create the earth according to thy heart while thou  
 wast alone;  
 Men, all cattle, large and small,  
 All that are upon the earth,  
 That go about upon their feet;  
 All that are on high,  
 That fly with their wings.  
 Thou makest the Nile in the nether world,  
 Thou bringest it as thou desirest,  
 To preserve alive the people;  
 For thou hast made them for thyself,  
 The Lord of them all, resting among them,  
 Thou Sun of to-day, great in majesty!  
 How excellent are thy designs, O Lord of eternity!

We have in this worship of the Sun as God an example, a heathen example, of what may be called "through nature to

God"—only it is carried to excess. Or, shall we rather say it is not carried far enough, seeing that the worshipper is content to stop with the creature (the sun) and worship it, when he ought to ascend higher, to the creature's Creator?

Compare these words with the familiar and glorious utterances of the Hebrew poet found in the Nineteenth Psalm, beginning, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handiwork." Or with the following no less significant and impressive utterances found in the twenty-ninth psalm:

Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name,—  
Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.

The voice of the Lord is upon the waters;  
The God of glory thundereth,  
Even the Lord upon many waters.  
The voice of the Lord is powerful;  
The voice of the Lord is full of majesty.  
The voice of the Lord breaketh the cedars;  
Yea, the Lord breaketh in pieces the cedars of Lebanon.  
He maketh them also to skip like a calf;  
Lebanon and Sirion like a young wild-ox.  
The voice of the Lord cleaveth the flames of fire.  
The voice of the Lord shaketh the wilderness;  
The Lord shaketh the wilderness of Kadesh.  
The voice of the Lord maketh the hinds to calve,  
And strippeth the forests bare:  
And in his temple everything saith, Glory.

Comparing the two, who feels like saying that the former is inspired of Satan and an abomination unto the Lord, while the latter is inspired of God and alone pleasing unto him? Are they not both outgoings of the soul towards God?—the former towards the Divine One but dimly known, the latter towards One better known in that, though both worshippers are seekers after God, the latter only has learned that God, to be worshipped aright, must be worshipped "in the beauty of holiness." "It is utterly out of the question," says Dr. Sanday, "to dismiss these things as products of unenlightened heathenism. It is quite certain that they are part of the witness which in every age God has left us of himself."

*4. The Religions of Ancient Greece and Rome*

It was in ancient Greece where the gods and goddesses of the popular faith were enshrined in mythology, in art and in literature, that polytheism received its highest and most poetic form and found such expression and embodiment in the life and thought of the people that the names and deeds of the gods and goddesses became an important and permanent part of the classic literature of the world. Familiar to all students of literature and religion throughout the civilised world are the names and deeds of Jupiter, the king of the gods, with his throne on Mount Olympus; Mars, the god of war; Neptune, the god of the sea; Pluto, the god of the infernal regions; Juno, the spouse of Jupiter and the queen of heaven; Minerva, the goddess of wisdom; Venus, the goddess of love and beauty; and innumerable other lesser gods and goddesses.

The earliest of the Greek philosophers to think his way through and away from the anthropomorphic gods of Homer and Hesiod, and to interpret the divine Being as the One, all-controlling Godhead, was Xenophanes, the founder of the Eleatic school of philosophic thought in ancient Greece. He taught that "God is all eye, all ear, all intellect; undivided and unmoved himself, he yet moves and rules all things by his thought."<sup>1</sup>

Socrates and Plato represent the highest product of heathen civilisation and of Greek culture both in their characters and in their philosophic and religious faith. The origin and government of the world these profound thinkers referred to a supreme Intelligence who was personal and possessed of moral attributes, but under this supreme over-lord there were inferior deities, "gods many and lords many." So that with all their high ideas in the realm of philosophy and their high ideals in the realm of ethics they must be classed as polytheists. Socrates followed an inward call from the gods in choosing his work, and prayed that the gods would give him those things which in their sight were good, for they alone, he said, were competent judges of good and ill. "Let us

<sup>1</sup> See Ueberwag's "History of Philosophy," Vol. I, p. 51.

begin," said Plato, "by asking whether all this which men call the universe is left to the guidance of an irrational and random chance, or, on the contrary, as our fathers declared, is ordered and governed by a marvellous Intelligence and wisdom." He followed his great teacher in believing that under the moral government of God, both in this life and in the future life, the good will be rewarded and the evil will be punished.

Next to Plato and Socrates came the Stoics as representatives of the highest that ancient heathen civilisation accomplished in ethical ideals; for they were more famed for their ethical than for their religious ideals. They recognised Zeus as supreme, but he was identified now with Deity as the immanent, creative force in matter, now with the all-ruling and immutable laws of nature, now with Providence, now with Destiny, and now with Fate. "As to the personality of the minor gods the old Stoics were vacillating; now they are spoken of as functions of nature and now again as persons." Dr. Menzies in his "History of Religions" defines Zeus as a "kind of Providence in whom a man may trust when he does right, and to all of whose dispensations it behooves him humbly to submit."

The religious faith of the Stoics reaches perhaps its highest expression in the famous "Hymn to Zeus" by Cleanthes, a Greek Stoic philosopher and poet, who lived in Asia Minor about three centuries before the Christian era. This hymn of Cleanthes to Zeus has been called "the perfection of Stoic prayers" and the most perfect expression of Stoic faith in Providence anywhere to be found:—

"O Zeus, above all gods most glorious, invoked by many a name, almighty, evermore, who didst found the world and guidest all by law, all hail! for it is right that all mortals address thee. We are thine offspring, alone of mortal things that live and walk the earth moulded in image of the All; therefore, thee will I hymn and thy might will I celebrate in song continually. Thee doth all this system that rolls around the earth obey in whatsoever path thou guidest it, and wil-

lingly is it governed by thee. Without thee, O Divine Being, no deed is done on earth, nor in the ethereal vault of heaven, nor in the deep, save only what wicked men do in the folly of their hearts. Nay more, what is uneven thy skill doth make even; what knew not order, it settled in order; and things that strive all find in thee a friend. For thus hast thou fitted all, evil with good, in one great whole, so that in all things reigns one reason eternally."

### III

#### THE FINAL TEST OF TRUTH IN RELIGION

But one needs only to study and compare the results of heathen religions with those of the Christian religion in the matter of their influence and effects on the culture and character of peoples and nations to determine which among the religions of the world is God's chosen and elect religious agency for the elevation of the human race and the progress of mankind in all the things that make life worth living, and worth living, not for a day only, but forever.

##### *i. A Question of Ethics*

That is the truest and noblest religion that has the greatest power to make manhood. A profound and philosophical student of the world's great religions has made a keen analysis of the effect of these different religions on personality and it yields these results: Buddhism with its pessimism paralyses personality; Confucianism with its ancestral worship and undue reverence for the past impoverishes personality; Hinduism with its arbitrary and inexorable customs of caste belittles and degrades personality; Mohammedanism, depending upon sensuality and the sword for its propagation, debases and enslaves personality. Christianity is the one and only religion of the world that emphasises and magnifies, that exalts and ennobles personality and character above everything else in life. Without the religion of the Old Testament the religion of the New Testament would not and could not have been. We are not unmindful of the high mission of the Hebrew reli-

gion and the rich contribution it made to personality, when we say that, however great this was, it is yet true that it was Christ who discovered and revealed to the world the true intrinsic value of manhood, apart from possessions or position. James Russell Lowell, calling attention to this fact, designated Christ as "The first true democrat that ever breathed."

And in like manner Christ has brought to the world the only true doctrine of the brotherhood of man which has ever been taught. Max Müller is our authority for saying that the word "mankind" never fell from the lips of Socrates or Plato or Aristotle. "Where the Greeks saw barbarians we see brethren; where the Greeks saw nations we see mankind." Lecky, the historian, has said of Christianity that while it has ever been favourable to the cultivation of patriotic and national feeling, it has yet "infused into Christendom a bond of unity which is superior to the divisions of nationhood." Hugo Grotius, the great jurist of Holland, who has been not improperly called the father of the modern science of international law, was a Christian commentator and theologian who studied much at the feet of Christ and derived his inspiration from him. In reviewing one of Grotius's works on this subject Edward Everett took occasion to remark that "The foundations of his immortal treatise on the law of nations are laid in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and the original conception of the work was in the genuine spirit of Christian philanthropy." The hope of human brotherhood and perpetual peace among the nations of the earth is in the practice of such international ethical ideals as find expression in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. It is in the supremely ethical religion that bears his name that we find the only adequate and satisfactory answer to the question, "What is religion?"

The best classification of religion, says Dr. Gwatkin, is by the value assigned to the individual. "In religions of mass, as Hegel called them, the individual is lost in the society; in religions of individuality, society exists for the individual; while Christianity as the one religion of spirit proclaims at once the supreme value of the individual and the need of society to bring him to perfection. This division answers

to the historical development of religion generally. First came the objective religions, then the subjective, then those that strive to reconcile in a higher unity the ideas of both. It is the same within the limits of Christianity. First came the Catholic systems, where man was made for the Church; then the Protestant in which the Church was made for man; and now we are feeling after something that shall give a real value to the Church consistent with the supreme value of the individual.”<sup>1</sup>

## *2. Error Mixed with Truth in Heathen Religions.*

It needs, however, to be stated that such expressions of faith in Providence as those found in the prayers of Nebuchadnezzar and Cleanthes and in the writings of Socrates and Plato are altogether exceptional and represent heathenism at its very best. As a rule the prayers of the heathen, as found in all the religions of the world, show that whatever flickering faith the people had in Providence had reference simply to some vague, occult and invisible power or spirit that might bring them things material, blessings purely physical. Heathenism is truly, as Dr. Dorner has said, “religion run wild,” and much of it is religion run mad. It is only because we feel that any religion that is an honest expression of the religious instinct and of man’s groping after God is better than no religion at all, that we can feel that most of the religions of the heathen world can be given a place among the providential agencies through which God works in and upon the human race. In studying them one and all in their entirety, we are impressed with their gross errors more than with their elements of truth, with their misconceptions and utterly inadequate interpretations and explanations of things divine and human more than with conceptions and interpretations that are helpful and satisfying to rational beings. God’s Providence has utilised in times past very faulty and imperfect men when no better instruments were available, and in like manner he may have used in time past, and may be using to-day, faulty and erroneous religions whenever and wherever the

<sup>1</sup> “Knowledge of God,” Vol. I, pp. 296-7.

true religion may not be available to satisfy men's religious needs.

After all has been said in recognition of the probable sincerity and honesty of the heathen gropings after God, an examination of the non-Christian religions of the world will reveal the fact that if the multitudinous and discordant conceptions of God that are found in them be under consideration, it is more fitting, at least in the case of most of them, that we should ask "What is God?" than that we inquire, "Who is God?" With many of these religions, God is impersonal, a thing rather than a person, and should be referred to by the neuter pronoun "It" rather than by the personal pronoun "He." There can be no better preparation for an appreciative consideration of the Christian religion, with a view to estimating its moral value to the human race in and through its rational and soul-satisfying conception of God, than to make a careful and comprehensive study both of the heathen religions of the world with reference to their varying conceptions of God and of modern anti-theistic substitutes for religion and for God. Max Müller, the great scholar and student of the ancient literatures and religions of the East, remarked after finishing his extended studies that one needs to do what he had done to fully appreciate the words of the apostle Paul to the Romans: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation"—and it alone is of all religions the wisdom and power of God adequate to meet man's religious needs. How utterly inadequate they, one and all, are to meet these spiritual needs will appear to every one who can make even a brief survey of their conceptions, or rather, their misconceptions, of God.

### *3. The Ethical and Spiritual Religion of Christ*

But the history of religion and of civilisation shows that men may become better than their gods; and, when they do, they become first critics of the prevalent conceptions and definitions of deity, and then, unless the gods are reinterpreted in nobler terms and higher ideals, they are discredited, dethroned and discarded. The natural tendency and result of

placing a higher conception of God side by side with a lower is to lead thoughtful people to abandon the lower and accept instead the higher conception. In this fact lies the hope and the inspiration of Christian missions. People who outgrow and discard their gods, because they have no higher conception of Deity to come in and meet their needs may become for a time agnostics and atheists; but such a no-faith in God is abnormal and cannot abide, because man is by nature a religious being, and he can never find rest until he finds it in God. Towards faith in some kind of a god man is always travelling. In the heathen conceptions of God men's hearts are at best but poorly and partially satisfied. Not until God is known as the Christian religion reveals him as a personal and ethical Being, as a holy and loving Father, are the souls of men fully and permanently satisfied. The paths that we shall travel all lead to the God and Father revealed to men by Jesus Christ in his person, in his teachings and his life.

If ever a religion has appeared among men that can claim to embody all truth, it is the Christian Religion. It has now come to pass that by it all other religions in the world are judged. If the facts and arguments presented in this volume, and the conclusions deduced therefrom, prove anything, they prove the incomparable superiority of the Christian religion over all other religions that have appeared among men.

In closing this chapter on "Religion and Religions," in which we have recognised that some elements of truth may be found in all religions, but have found satisfaction only in the one religion that bears "the name that is above every name," there come to us the words with which Auguste Sabatier, the most distinguished of French Protestant theologians, closes the fourth chapter of his "Outline of a Philosophy of Religion," and they are words eminently fitting to quote here:

"A few years ago there assembled in Chicago what the Americans called the Parliament of Religions. The official representatives of all the principal religions of the new world and the old met together under a common feeling of religious brotherhood. They did not discuss the value of their rites

or dogmas: their object was to approach each other, to edify each other, and, for the first time in the world's history, to present the spectacle of a universal religious communion. When it came to the point, three things became clear: first, the common name under which they were able to call upon God—the Father. Secondly, the Lord's Prayer was adopted and recited by all. Thirdly, Christ himself, apart from all theological definition, was unanimously recognised and venerated as the Master and Initiator of the higher religious life.

"In my own consciousness this practical demonstration is completed. I can hardly help being religious; but if I am seriously to be religious I can only be so under the Christian form. I can hardly help praying; but if I desire to pray, if moral anguish or intellectual doubt constrain me to seek some form of prayer that I can use in all sincerity, I never find but these words: 'Our Father who art in heaven.' Lastly, I may disdain the inner life of the soul, and divert myself from it by the distractions of science, art and social life; but if, wearied by the world of pleasure or of toil, I wish to find my soul again and live a deeper life, I can accept no other guide and master than Jesus Christ, because in him alone optimism is without frivolity and seriousness is without despair."

CHAPTER FOUR  
THROUGH NATURE TO GOD



## CHAPTER FOUR

### THROUGH NATURE TO GOD

And Nature, the old Nurse, took  
The child upon her knee,  
Saying, "Here is a story-book  
Thy Father has written for thee.  
Come, wander with me," she said,  
"Into regions yet untrod,  
And read what is yet unread  
In the manuscripts of God."<sup>1</sup>

In answering the question, who and what and where is God, by defining him as a personal, omnipresent Spirit, and the only Being, or form of being, that has existed from all eternity, we found it most reasonable to conceive of him as the Creator and source of all other forms of existence in the universe other than himself. The creaturely world that comes from him, and of which we are a conscious part, embraces two distinct forms of existence that we call spirit and matter. Both of these unite in man, a conscious spirit and a physical body. There are beings, the Scriptures tell us, that are purely spiritual and that have no connection with physical bodies, but we know so little of these angelic beings that they will not enter into our present study.

#### I

##### WHAT IS NATURE?

Taking the universe as we find it, we may conveniently divide it into three orders or types of creaturely existence: first, the inorganic inanimate physical universe which is conserved and regulated or governed by God according to certain

<sup>1</sup> These beautiful lines were written by Longfellow on the fiftieth birthday of Agassiz.

uniform principles called the laws of nature; secondly, animate existence including the vegetable and animal world, over which the Creator exercises such providential care as is necessary to sustain the life that he created; and thirdly, rational creatures, those beings who possess, in addition to material bodies and physical life, an intellectual and spiritual nature, and moral free-agency. "Nature," as we use the term in this chapter on "Through Nature to God," embraces the first two of these forms of creaturely existence, but not the third, which we shall consider separately in a later chapter which may be appropriately titled "Through Man to God." All forms of animate and inanimate existence lower than man have a place in the created universe not for their own sake and because of their own worth so much as because of their relation to man and for the purpose of ministering to him who alone of the three is rational, moral and spiritual. Nevertheless, because the physical exists to minister to the higher intellectual and rational order of beings, the lower forms of existence are permeated with the mind of their Creator in that they carry within themselves the evidences of their dependence upon the divine Being both for their origin and their continuance in existence. Because of this fact, nature is a pathway to God and we can travel through nature to nature's God.

That physical nature both animate and inanimate carries within itself evidences that prove the existence of a divine Creator and Preserver has been recognised ever since the mind of man has engaged in thinking and reasoning. Whether the evidence that nature furnishes is sufficient to demonstrate to a certainty to all men, or to any man, the existence of a divine Being may be questioned, but the history of human thought, whether in the form of philosophy or of theology, furnishes abundant evidence that whenever and wherever men have engaged in thinking and have made a record of their thoughts, they have travelled in thought from and through nature to nature's God. Indeed we may safely say that such is the nature of the human mind, that thinking men, looking upon the visible world around them, cannot fail to reason from nature up to the Power or divine Source from which nature

came. The microscope in one direction and the telescope in another have enriched and enlarged immensely the study of nature in our day, revealing worlds infinitesimal within worlds,—atoms within atoms and cells within cells—and worlds beyond worlds, so marvellous and complex, and yet all, from the smallest to the greatest, so orderly and completely organised in each separate detail that it is inconceivable that it has all come into existence by chance, without any originating and directing Mind back of it and over it, and that it continues in operation from age to age without any supervising Intelligence.

## II

## THE INORGANIC WORLD

I. *The Physical Universe*

The three great fundamental entities of the physical universe, according to science, are matter, ether and energy. "Matter and ether are receptacles or vehicles of energy;" but what these entities really are is a subject of speculation among scientists. Some scientists do not believe in the existence of ether at all as an "entity," while others believe that it is an "entity" pervading all space and all matter. If matter, however, be defined in general terms as anything and everything that exists in infinite space that is not spirit, then ether is not to be distinguished from matter any more than the air that envelops our planet is, but is simply a subtle form of matter that so pervades all space and so coexists with all other forms of matter in space that there can be no space in the universe where ether is not. As no particle of matter, however small, can either come into existence or be destroyed, and as there is no such thing as empty space devoid of "ethereal" matter, so there is, scientists tell us, no such thing as rest. "Every particle that goes to make up our solid earth is in a state of perpetual, unremitting vibration; energy is the universal commodity on which all life depends." Energy is that "other something" that is found wherever matter is which not only

"makes the world go round" but which is making—so modern science teaches—everything else in the material world to move, from the tiniest of the atoms that make up molecules to the greatest of worlds in the heavenly spaces.

Our study of physical nature is bounded by two extremes, represented (1) by the infinitely great as found in the heavenly bodies, the size, numbers and distances of which surpass the powers of the human mind to conceive or even to imagine; and (2) by the infinitesimally minute as revealed by the microscope in the scientific study of the elements and atoms that enter into physical nature and of the biological cells that enter into vegetable and animal life. Then between the two comes the familiar world in which we live. It is impossible to say which of the three is the most marvellous and impressive in nature, the infinitely great as revealed in the telescope or the infinitesimally small as revealed in the microscope, or the objects, at once useful, beneficent and beautiful, that surround us and enter into our life. All three of them are pathways to God which were travelled long before the construction of telescopes and microscopes or the advent of modern science with its marvellous additions to man's knowledge of well-nigh everything that enters into human life.

## *2. What Is Matter?*

I have spoken of spirit and matter as the two distinct things, or substances, or forms of being, that exist in our world. What now, let us ask, is matter? We have answered, or are supposed to have answered in part at least, the question as to spirit in a previous chapter, seeing that finite spirit was described in defining God as the one personal, divine and eternal Spirit who possesses certain given attributes not predicate of matter and who created man in his own image and put him in possession of his own attributes as far as the attributes of an infinite Being could be imparted to a finite creature. The human spirit will be the subject of further study in the chapter titled "Through Man to God." But the other question must now be raised, and the attempt made to define "matter" or at least to state what we mean by the word

when we use it. It may be that the attempt to define matter and physical life, as also to define spirit, will reveal how much we do not know rather than what we do know.

Ever since men began to think things through, to look through the surface and shows of things into the essence of things, they have been asking what is matter. While the nature of matter is still a hidden secret and a subject of speculation in our day as truly as it was in the days of the ancient Greek philosophers, the studies and experiments of physicists and chemists in the last half century have added more to our knowledge of matter and its properties than had been gained from all previous study and investigation.

The studies and experiments of scientists have revealed the fact that there are ninety-two<sup>1</sup> different "elements" that enter into the constitution of our earth. Ninety-nine per cent of what we call the crust of the earth, however, is made out of only twenty of these elements. Indeed three fourths of the earth's visible crust is made up of only two elements, oxygen and silicon, three eighths being oxygen.

### *3. What Are Atoms, Molecules, Radiant-matter and Electrons?*

Matter is composed of minute particles called atoms. The word "atom" means etymologically something that cannot be cut or further divided, being composed of two Greek words, "a," negative, and "temnein" to cut. When material substances are divided and subdivided until the last possible division has been reached, and matter is thus reduced to its primary and ultimate units, these indivisible physical units are called "atoms." An atom is too small to be visible even by the aid of the most powerful microscope that the ingenuity of man has been able to construct. But although atoms are invisible they can be weighed and measured. What was once considered to be an indivisible atom has been further divided by modern scientific analysis, so that there are atoms within atoms. An atom has been described as "a particle of matter

<sup>1</sup> Scientific writers differ among themselves as to the number of "elements" so far discovered; many still say "eighty-two."

which is a million times smaller than the breadth of a hair." Atoms of different elementary substances differ greatly from each other in size and weight. Some atoms are so small, Professor Thomson tells us, that "it would take four hundred million of them, arranged in a straight line, to cover one inch of space. It takes a quintillion atoms of gold to weigh a single gramme. Five million atoms of helium could be placed in a line across the diameter of a full stop like that at the end of this sentence." And yet we are now told that atoms are far from being the last reducible unit of matter, but that each and every atom is composed of lesser particles called electrons which are in ceaseless and incredibly rapid motion, and that atoms are shown by means of the X-ray and radium to be continually shooting off from themselves these constituent electrons as radiant matter, comparable to electric sparks.<sup>1</sup> The fact that the atom of one chemical element may combine with one or more atoms of another element makes possible the many different kinds of matter found in nature. Thus, if we combine one atom of oxygen and two atoms of hydrogen we have water, which constitutes 70 per cent of all living matter. All combinations of the elements of nature represent a chemical process or change by which a substance is produced which is totally distinct from each and every one of its ingredients. The number of substances or things in the world that have been made or may be made out of different combinations of the ninety-two chemical elements is incalculably great.

Atoms have been compared to the bricks out of which a building is constructed and called the bricks of the material universe. But single atoms are not supposed to exist separate and apart from each other. Atoms come together in groups or aggregations that make what we call molecules. The following statements reveal the nature and characteristics of molecules and show how large a place they fill among the won-

<sup>1</sup> The reader is referred to Thomson's "Outline of Science" for a full presentation of the new conception of atoms and electrons as radiant matter, and for information in popular form concerning other matters of scientific interest.

ders of the world we live in:—"Molecules are composed of at least two or more atoms and constitute the smallest particles of matter or aggregations of atoms that are available for scientific study and experiment. In liquids the molecules hang together loosely; in solids they cohere firmly; in gases they are in a more or less violent state of commotion and form no union with each other. But the very hardest of solids are really more like lattice work or sponges than like solids, as that word is popularly understood. For example, if a bar of solid gold is placed in a little pool of mercury, the gold will take in the mercury between its molecules as if it were porous like a sponge. A grain of gold has been beaten out into a thin leaf that covered seventy-five inches square, and it was a thousand times thinner than the paper on which these words are printed. The wall of an inflated soap-bubble is less than three millionths of an inch in thickness, and, thin as that is, it is over fifteen times as thick as the thinnest film of oil that has been poured upon the surface of water. And yet that gold leaf, and wall of the soap bubble and film of oil, at their thinnest points, are composed of at least two molecules—which means that a molecule of oil is less than one hundred millionth of an inch in diameter.

"In a single cubic centimetre of air—a globule about the size of a small marble—there are thirty million trillion molecules. Each molecule of air which seems so still in the house on a sultry summer afternoon is really travelling faster, as we inhale it into our lungs, than a bullet is travelling when fired from the barrel of a rifle. And every single molecule of air that crowds the atmosphere in which we live and move collides with another and different molecule twenty thousand times in every inch of space through which it moves, and is turned from its course by these collisions five billion times every second. If the molecules of argon (the colourless, odourless, gaseous element found in the air) which are contained in less than one half of a cubic inch, could be placed end to end, it would make a line long enough to extend around the circumference of the earth two hundred times,—in other

words a line five million miles long. Or, to put it differently, in a centimetre of air (a globule about the size of a small marble) there are thirty million trillion molecules."<sup>1</sup>

We have previously defined matter in terms of elements, atoms and molecules. But the most wonderful thing about matter and its atoms remains yet to be told. The discovery of radium with its remarkable properties, and of the X-ray, and radiant-matter as the material of which atoms are composed, has revolutionised the conception of matter hitherto held by scientists. Although scientists do not all write alike in presenting the new view of matter, and differ in some respects as to the nature of atoms and electrons, they are in agreement in no longer considering matter, as they once did, as "very minute particles of solid substance such as wax or carbon, but now regard it as a form of physical energy, seeing that the electrons that compose the atoms are moving and revolving within the atoms with incredible speed." According to the new view every atom of matter of whatever kind throughout the whole universe is built up of electrons in conjunction with a nucleus, and "consists of groups of corpuscles revolving in concentric rings or spheres and arranging themselves in such rings, according to their number and speed." A scientific writer in a recent number of the *Popular Science* monthly declares that on this new conception of atoms as radiant-matter and electrons well nigh all the hitherto obscure phenomena of atoms can be satisfactorily explained.

#### 4. *What Is Energy?*

"Energy has come to be known," says Professor J. Arthur Thomson, "as something quite as distinct and permanent as matter itself. As it is humanly impossible to create or destroy a particle of matter, so it is impossible to create or to destroy energy. If energy disappears in one form, it reappears in another. And we may add that, just as we are ignorant of what the negative and positive particles of electricity which

<sup>1</sup> See Thomson's "Outline of Science." It is of the highest importance that we present all such inconceivable statements of scientific facts in the exact language of scientists themselves.

constitute matter really are, so we are ignorant of the true nature of energy."<sup>1</sup>

But, ignorant as we are of the "true nature of energy," there is no conception so necessary to the modern idea of nature,—so writes Dr. Fairbairn,—as that of energy, for without it no change and no continuity would be possible. "Without it nature would be simply an inert, unmoved, unmovable mass of matter." Energy is the cause of all physical changes. The conservation and indestructibility of energy in nature and the correlation and convertibility of the forces of nature into different modes of motion constitute the cause and the explanation both of that which is permanent and persistent and that which is mutable and transmissible in nature. Energy is held to be "constant in quantity, indestructible and persistent in essence, but infinitely varied in mode; while ever changing its form, it yet never ceases to be capable at once of a permutation which knows no rest and a continuance which knows no break."

But the conception of energy is an idea which we arrive at only in and through experience. This means that we derive the notion of energy from our own conscious possession of free power within and our experience in producing definite and desired results in the physical world without by the conscious exercise of this power of free will within. And this in turn means that the idea of causation in nature is a clear if not a necessary deduction from Will. In other words a necessitated being,—a being who had, and could have, no experience in producing results in the world without by the conscious exercise of free will within—could not form or conceive the notion of energy. When we speak of energy, therefore, and attempt to explain matter through it, what are we doing but interpreting nature in terms of Will—of free will that has no intelligible meaning apart from Personality—thus using what is given in the consciousness within as the key with which we open the mysteries and reveal the realities which exist without? We thus reach the conclusion that energy in nature is the correlate of freedom in man; and in as much as

<sup>1</sup> "Outline of Science," p. 282.

man, were he not free and conscious of power, could have no conception of energy, the fact of energy in nature to the extent that it is coextensive with the physical universe, carries along with it the necessary implication that there must be a Free Will, the free will of a Person, that can account for and produce the energy of the universe. Energy, thus, even more than matter, becomes a pathway that leads to God.<sup>1</sup>

### III

#### THE ORGANIC WORLD

Surely all this marvellous arrangement of atoms and this orderly operation of nature's laws cannot exist simply for their own sake. That is unthinkable. Let us turn now from the inorganic and lifeless world to the organic world of life; and see if we cannot find in the organic world the explanation and *raison d'être* of the inorganic.

##### I. *Whence Comes Life?*

Proceeding then yet further in our study of nature, we find something more significant and wonderful than mere physical existence. We find *life*, and life in nature demands not only a living Cause but a life-giving Cause as the only adequate rational explanation of its origin.

The material universe in its inorganic form, considered apart from the presence of life, calls for God as the only adequate cause to account for its existence, its attributes and its orderly motion; but the presence of life here increases a hundredfold the rational necessity for assuming the existence of a living God in order to account for nature, teeming with life as it is on our planet. Science teaches that this planet and all other parts of the material universe were once in a molten and even gaseous state; were nothing but star dust and fire mist, in which a seed or germ of life could no more exist than it can exist in the molten lava of the volcano. How did life ever originate here? Whence came the first seed of vege-

<sup>1</sup> See Fairbairn's "Philosophy of the Christian Religion," pp. 34-35.

table life, and whence the first egg or embryo of animal life? The Scriptures answer that "in the beginning God created it"—different forms in successive days. Science answers that it came by evolution, but that does not answer the question as to its origin. That could only answer the question as to how it came, not whence it first came. Life is something more than matter, different from matter, and higher than matter. If the lower (matter and its properties) demands a personal Creator to account for it, *a fortiori*, how much more does the higher (life and its attributes) demand a God to account for it.

Seeing, then, that nature as we know it abounds in life—vegetable, animal, and rational life—it follows that, with the first sign of life in nature, there arises a new and profounder necessity than has hitherto appeared for declaring that there must be a Being capable of originating life in a hitherto lifeless universe. "The rocks beneath our feet attest that our planet was not always as it is now; that animals existed long before man; that the lower forms of animal life are earlier than the higher; and that our planet was once destitute of even the lowest forms of life. So far as is known to science, all life is derived from pre-existing life. And the known forces of nature as we see them operating are altogether inadequate in and of themselves either to produce out of inorganic matter the mysterious chemical compounds which make up living bodies, or to form them into organic cells, or to endow them with the functions of life. In other words, in the observed order of the universe, the forces of material nature never bridge over the interval between the lifeless and the living, and seem utterly incapable of doing so. The presence of life, therefore, as we now see it, in what was once a lifeless world, reveals unmistakably a Power infinitely greater than the forces observed in nature."

Linnæus, the great botanist, once said, after watching the unfolding of a blossom: "I saw God in his glory passing near me, and bowed my head in worship." The sight of the little flower in the crannied wall evoked from Tennyson the same reverential sense of the Divine Presence:

"Flower in the crannied wall,  
I pluck you out of the crannies,  
I hold you here, root and all, in my hand,  
Little flower—but if I could understand,  
What you are, root and all, and all in all,  
I should know what God and man is."

## *2. Interrelations of Living Things*

It is important for us to recognise the fact that all things in this world of ours are so related to each other and so interwoven are their laws and forces in contributing to each other and depending upon each other for the fulfilment of the ends and functions of their being that they constitute one great family in a complex "web of life." Nature, organic and inorganic, and life, physical, vegetable, animal and human all constitute one great whole and can be understood and rightly interpreted only when studied in their common unity as well as in their separate individuality. This is both the scientific and the religious way of looking at things. To illustrate how flowers and insects are related to each other, Mr. Darwin once told a "Cats and Clover story" which when published soon spread around the world. We condense it as it was reproduced and published.

"Around a hundred heads of the purple clover Darwin placed muslin bags in such a manner that the air and the sunlight got in freely, but all insects were shut out. From these hundred heads of clover that had no insect visitors he failed to secure a single real seed, while from another hundred heads near by to which the bees and other insects had access, he obtained twenty-seven thousand good seeds, an average of two hundred and seventy seeds to each head. These latter heads had been visited by the bumble-bees which resulted in the cross-fertilisation of the clover. Hence, the more bumble-bees the better next year's crop of clover. But the field-mice are fond of bumble-bees and invade their nests and devour them. Therefore, the more field-mice the fewer bumble-bees, and the poorer next year's clover crop. But in the neighbourhood of villages there are fewer field-mice than in the open country, and this because the cats that abound in the village hunt them

and kill them, though they do not eat them. Therefore, the more cats the fewer field-mice, and the fewer field-mice, the more bumble-bees, and the more bumble-bees the better next year's crop of clover. The more clover the richer pasture for cattle, and the more cattle the more meat and milk and butter for man. The more cat-loving children and cat-protecting old ladies there are in the village, the more cats there will be and this will mean more clover. Thus it is that cats and clover and cattle and children and commerce and civilisation are all woven together in the web of life."

When Isaiah said, "All flesh is grass . . . surely the people is grass," he was uttering a truth of deeper significance than he perhaps knew. Vegetable life is the basis of well-nigh all the life on our planet. When Job calls man a worm of the dust and Micah compares his movements in the world to worms coming out of their holes in the earth, we feel that man is being likened unto one of the most useless and despicable forms of animal existence. And yet naturalists tell us that the vegetation of the world and the sustenance of all animal life depends in no small degree upon the work of this lowly and repellent creature. How few of us recognise the fact that "there are," to quote the words of a naturalist, "from fifty thousand to five hundred thousand earthworms at work in every acre of soil, the number depending upon the character of the soil. On an average these lowly creatures pass ten tons of earth per acre through their bodies in a year. The plough is one of man's most useful inventions; but long before man or his plough were in existence, the earthworms were at work ploughing the soil and preparing it for the rain to soak in and produce vegetation." An eminent English naturalist, Gilbert White, wrote in appreciation of the great contribution which these humble "children of the soil" have made to the progress of the world, as follows: "Earthworms, though in appearance a small and despicable link in the chain of nature, are the great promoters of vegetation. This service they render by boring, perforating, and loosening the soil, and rendering it pervious to rains and the fibres of plants, by drawing straws and stalks into the soil; and most of all by throwing

up such infinite numbers of lumps of earth. But for them the earth would soon become cold, hard-bound, and void of fermentation and consequently sterile." In view of these facts we do not wonder that an even greater naturalist than Gilbert White—Charles Darwin—observes: "It may be doubted whether there are many other animals which have played so important a part in the history of the earth as have these lowly creatures."

The examples which we have here cited of the dependence of one form of life on another are taken with a view to showing that the very highest, man, is dependent for his well-being on the very lowest, the tiny insects that flit from flower to flower and the earthworms that are consigned to an even more lowly task and to a habitation devoid of everything which in the eyes of mankind makes life worth living. If the very lowest forms of life serve the highest, it follows that intervening living organisms whether great or small must fill some divine function in the organic world of living things and be a part of Nature's great complex and correlated whole. The working of this law of interdependence among living things could be illustrated by innumerable examples taken from the higher ranks and forms of life, some of which will be presented later.

#### IV

#### THE APPEAL FROM NATURE TO NATURE'S GOD

Can the human mind conceive of anything more impressive and astounding than the facts revealed by this marvellous insight into physical nature and its relation to vegetable and animal life? From molecules to man; from radiant-matter to spirit; from electrons to volitions—what a complicated network! And yet the most perfect order and adaptation reign everywhere, while the lower everywhere ministers to the higher. How explain it all? There is but one answer:—These things are the marks of mind. Mind there must be somewhere. It is only a question as to where the mind that is so manifest in this wonderful and marvellous order of things is located. Is

it most reasonable to locate it in the physical matter of the universe, or, following the analogy of this world and this life of ours, to locate it in personality, in a Personality whose powers are equal to the results seen? There can be but one answer to this question.

### *1. The Analogy Between Human and Divine Workers*

Side by side with the objects of nature, in our world, are numerous objects which owe their forms of existence to the minds and handiwork of man. These works of men are due in varying degrees to the desire and thought and skill and patient toil of those who made them. But it matters not how great the products of human workmanship may be, it is always true that the worker is greater than his work. The architect and builder is greater than his building; the author greater than his book; the poet greater than his poem; the musician and composer greater than his music, and the artist is greater than his picture. Must not the same thing be true in the material universe among the objects of nature. Must it not be true here just as among the works of man, that the worker is greater than his work? And if the works of nature be greater than the works of man, the Worker who made the objects of nature must be correspondingly greater than the greatest of human workers. "The splendour of nature, surpassing all that man can make and prompting his own best thoughts and works, proclaims that behind and above the material world is a Worker as much above nature as the artist is greater than his picture, and as much above man as the vast and glorious universe is greater than the noblest works of man."<sup>1</sup> This most wonderful edifice which we inhabit, though it is but a tiny part of the material universe, bears ceaseless evidence to the wisdom and skill and power of the great Architect who planned and builded it and whose exhaustless energy maintains it in being.

"Every house," says the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, "is builded by some man, but he that built all things is God." "That which may be known of God is manifest in and to the Gentiles," says Paul in his Epistle to the Romans; "for

<sup>1</sup> J. Ager Beet, "Manual of Theology," p. 4.

God hath showed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse." So multitudinous are the evidences of mind and thought and purpose in nature, and so thoroughly do these evidences correspond with the mind and thought and purpose of man as seen in his handiworks of utility and art that the failure of the earth's inhabitants to discern and acknowledge the hand of the Creator in the vast world of nature is attributable not to any lack of evidence but to moral causes, which fact leaves them without excuse for agnosticism and unbelief. Such is the thought of the great Apostle to the Gentiles.

## 2. *God in His Heavens*

Those who have sought and seen God in nature seem first of all and most of all to have discovered the signs of his presence in the heavens. The relation that exists between nature and its Creator has never been more beautifully expressed than in the following words found in the beginning of the Nineteenth Psalm:

"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun, which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race. His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it; and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof."

These words of the Psalmist teach us that God is revealed in nature, and represent the revelation thus made of him as ceaseless, going on day and night in all seasons, and as co-extensive with all races of men and with all parts of the earth. They declare, moreover, that nature speaks of God as its Creator in a language that all can hear and understand. The poetic para-

phrase which Joseph Addison has made of the Psalmist's language quoted above is admired and sung wherever the Christian faith and the English language have gone:

The spacious firmament on high,  
With all the blue ethereal sky,  
And spangled heavens, a shining frame,  
Their great Original proclaim;  
Th' unwearied sun, from day to day  
Doth his Creator's power display,  
And publishes to every land  
The work of an almighty hand.

Soon as the evening shades prevail,  
The moon takes up the wondrous tale,  
And nightly to the list'ning earth  
Repeats the story of her birth;  
While all the stars that round her burn,  
And all the planets in their turn,  
Confirm the tidings as they roll,  
And spread the truth from pole to pole.

What though, in solemn silence, all  
Move round the dark, terrestrial hall?  
What though no real voice nor sound  
Amid the radiant orbs be found?  
In reason's ear they all rejoice,  
And utter forth a glorious voice  
Forever singing as they shine,  
"The hand that made us is divine."

So much of God did the Psalmist see as he looked in devout meditation at the heavenly bodies. There is perhaps nothing in the entire range of nature-poetry more striking and beautiful than this poetic description of the sun. And yet how little did the Psalmist know of the heavenly bodies in comparison with the humblest student of nature who is familiar with the contents of a modern book of astronomy. With the natural eye about seven thousand stars can be seen; more than ten times as many with an opera glass, and with the largest telescope approximately a hundred million may be seen.

If we compare our sun in size with the stars, says Professor

J. Arthur Thomson,<sup>1</sup> it must be called a small and insignificant body, physically considered. One of the stars, known as Betelgeux, has been measured, and has been found to have a diameter three hundred times greater than that of our sun. The sun is 866,000 miles in diameter, a hundred times greater than that of our earth. Surrounding the sun is a silvery halo or atmosphere of silvery light called the corona which extends for millions of miles into space. The sun is over ninety-two million miles away from our earth, and as the earth moves in its orbit around the sun at the rate of a thousand miles a minute, six months from now we will be 185 million miles away from where we are at this moment. The nearest star to our earth is known as Alpha Centauri, and it is twenty-five million millions of miles away,—that is, nearly three million times as far away from our sun as our sun is. Sirius, the brightest star in our firmament, is twice that distance, or five and a half million times as far away from us as our sun is. As a result of twenty years of work in this field, it is now known that the more distant stars of the Milky Way are at least a hundred thousand trillion miles away from our sun. Now light is known to travel at the rate of 186 thousand miles a second; and that means that if you could look through the Yerkes Observatory telescope to-night and see one of those more distant stars, the rays of light that come from it into your eye would have started on their long journey 25,000 years ago, or, if it will be more satisfactory and accurate to use Archbishop Usher's chronology, approximately 19,000 years before, on the sixth day of Creation, the human race in the persons of Adam and Eve was started upon its checkered career.

When we consider these and other like facts pertaining to the heavens, the words of the Psalmist found in the One Hundred and Forty-eighth Psalm, should mean more to us than they could possibly have meant to him who first uttered them and cannot seem inappropriate on the lips of any one who sees God in Nature: "Praise ye the Lord from the heavens; praise him in the heights. Praise ye him, sun and moon; praise

<sup>1</sup> The statements in this paragraph are gathered from "The Outline of Science."

him, all ye stars of light. Praise him, ye heaven of heavens, and ye waters that be above the heavens. Let them praise the name of the Lord; for he commanded, and they were created."

### 3. *God in His World*

Not only is our sun one of the smallest of the myriads of stars, but our earth is one of the smallest of the planets. Reasoning from analogy we have good ground for believing that many, if not all, of the stars are suns surrounded by planetary systems similar to our own; but so distant are these other suns and so small relatively are the planets that belong to them it is quite impossible to see them even with the most powerful telescope. Nothing impresses a thoughtful student of the physical universe more deeply than the utter insignificance and absolute littleness of our earth as compared with the dimensions and immense distances of the other heavenly bodies. It is less relatively than a drop of water in the ocean or a grain of sand on the seashore. Our earth has been described as "a pinpoint in the physical universe." If we are to find anything significant, therefore, in our planet, it must be not in its size, but in its contents.

Examining our earth, then, with a view to discovering in its contents its real and true significance, we find three things worthy of consideration and so profoundly significant as to suggest, if they do not require, dependence upon God for their origin and continued existence. These things are: (1) matter, with its elements, and minute atoms filled with their stores of energy; (2) life, vegetable and animal, with its minute cells and germs, and (3) spirit, that occupies no space but manifests itself in beings possessed of self-consciousness, mind, conscience, reason, personality, and other like attributes. The significance and wonders of our earth, then, must be sought not in that which is immense and great in size, but rather in things that are minute and small, some of them infinitesimally small. The physical elements that enter into our earth are shared in common with the sun and the stars as has been abundantly proved, but in the study of life and spirit we

are wholly dependent upon our earth; for the sun, moon and stars furnish us with no data.

In studying the heavens we sought God in and through the infinite and the boundless, and saw him in the invisibly great. In studying matter with its minute molecules and atoms and electrons, we must needs seek him in and through the finite; and find him, if we may, in the invisibly little, in the infinitesimal in nature,—in material atoms and biological cells and life germs so minute that they are not only invisible even with the most powerful magnifying lens but their littleness passes human comprehension. But the incomprehensibly great and the incomprehensibly small both alike demand an incomprehensibly infinite Intelligence and Power to account for and unite them—the infinitely great and the infinitesimally small—in one and the same universe of being.

## V

## A REASONABLE INFERENCE

And thus it is that whether we look at the great star, Betelgeux, thirty thousand times larger than our earth, the greatest object man has ever beheld, or at the tiny invisible atom in the vibrant air, or at the unshapely little worm of the earth crawling at our feet, the lowliest of all creatures, we see God—in the one case we see the symbol of his glory in the great things of heaven, and in the other the proof of his power and goodness in the little things of the earth.

1. *Either God or Chance*

One of our most widely known and popular American orators, a devout believer in God as the author of nature and in nature as a manifestation of the power and goodness of God, has expressed his faith in words that will appeal to all Christian believers, even to those who do not share all of his views on matters of traditional theology and modern science:

We see manifestations of God's power in the ebb and flow of the tides; in the mighty "shoreless rivers of the ocean"; in the

suspended water in the clouds—billions of tons, seemingly defying the law of gravitation while they await the command that sends them down in showers of blessings. We behold it in the lightning's flash and the thunder's roar; and in the invisible germ of life that contains within itself the power to gather its nourishment from the earth and air, fulfil its mission and propagate its kind.

We see all about us, also, conclusive proofs of the infinite intelligence and fathomless love of the Heavenly Father. On lofty mountain summits he builds his mighty reservoirs and piles high the winter snows, which, melting, furnish the water for the singing brooks, for the hidden veins, and for the springs that pour out their refreshing flood through the smitten rocks. At his touch the same element that furnishes ice to cool the fevered brow furnishes also the steam to move man's commerce on sea and land. He imprisons in roaring cataracts exhaustless energy for the service of man: he stores away in the bowels of the earth beds of coal and rivers of oil; he studs the canyon's frowning walls with precious metals and priceless gems; he extends his magic wand, and the soil becomes rich with fertility; the early and latter rains supply the needed moisture, and the sun, with its marvellous alchemy, transmutes base clay into golden grain. He gives us in infinite variety the fruits of the orchard, the vegetables of the garden and the berries of the woods. He gives us the sturdy oak of the forest for timber and also the fruit-bearing tree and the graceful palm.

In compassion he makes the horse to bear our burdens, and the cow to supply the dairy; and he gives us the faithful domestic fowl. He makes the fishes to scour the sea for sustenance and then yield themselves up as food for man. He sends the bee forth to gather sweets for us and birds to sing our cares away. He paints the skies with the grey of the morning and the glow of the sunset; he sets his radiant bow in the clouds and copies its colours in myriads of flowers. He gives to the babe a mother's love, to the child a father's care, to parents the joy of children, to brothers and sisters the sweet associations of the fireside, and he gives to each and

all the friend that makes companionship sweet. Surely everything that hath breath should praise the Lord.<sup>1</sup>

In these words we find metaphor and poetry and rhetoric on fire with faith and aglow with love, arraying the facts of nature and life in a cumulative argument sufficient, it would seem, to convince every man who is not blinded by prejudice and sensuality that things like these could not have come by chance. If these things could have come by chance, then every unbeliever would be justified in spelling chance with a capital C and worshipping it, as Frederick Emerson Brooks has said in one of his poems:

If chance could fashion but a little flower,  
With perfume for each tiny thief,  
And furnish it with sunshine and with shower,  
Then chance would be Creator with the power  
To build a world for unbelief.

But if these multitudinous blessings of nature do not come, and cannot come, by chance, then surely the least the recipient of these blessings can do is to seek and to find the real and true Source from which they do come—and, finding that they come from One who is all-loving, acknowledge the gift with feelings of gratitude and words of thanksgiving.

In expressing sentiments like these we find theistic evolutionists and theistic anti-evolutionists in perfect accord.

## 2. *The Spiritual Interpretation of Nature*

One impulse from a vernal wood  
Will teach you more of man,  
Of moral evil and of good,  
Than all the sages can.

Thus wrote William Wordsworth, the great poet of nature. "Every flower," says Dr. Lyman Abbot, "is a new Creation. Every day God separates the waters that are under the firmament from the waters that are above the firmament; for he it is who daily and hourly lifts the clouds from their ocean bed and causes them to float in the air above. Every spring is a new creation, and God himself is the secret and the source and the center of all the life."

<sup>1</sup> W. J. Bryan, a free quotation from "In His Image."

When nature is thus interpreted, every bush of the desert is seen to be aflame with God. "The Bible," says Dr. G. A. Johnston Ross, "has its own unique and comprehensive spiritual interpretation of nature and of our relation to it; its own explanation of the place of man in the natural world, of the sympathy existing between him and that nature of which he is a part and yet designed to be moral sovereign; of the prospect before nature through the medium of the moralisation of men and their rising to the stature of sons of God." Whatever may be the defect of the Old Testament as compared with the New, it cannot be said to lack a proper recognition of the value of nature as a channel to faith in God. To commune with nature was for the Old Testament poets and prophets to worship God.

And Christ's spiritual interpretation of nature is a revelation both of himself, and of the God who gave nature not only physical but moral beauty. If Jesus was a "Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief," he was also a companion of nature, and acquainted with the quiet joy that such companionship always yields to devout souls. The Son of Man was the greatest of all interpreters of nature, and from his love and use of nature we should learn to love it and use it.

"Life sang as well as sobbed for him. It was not in barren, priest-ridden Judea that Jesus was brought up and passed most of his life, but in fair, fertile, simple-hearted Galilee, where men lived near to nature. And afterwards, in the stress and heat of those burning years of his public ministry, how often did he turn aside to the restful lake shore, the quiet mountain side, the secluded garden, for refreshment and soothing and strength in communion with nature and through nature with the Father! Though neither botanist nor geologist, biologist nor ornithologist, never was there such a nature-teacher as Jesus. The Sermon on the Mount and other discourses abound in spiritual lessons drawn from nature. No part of this sweet sermon which the summer winds of Galilee have wafted to us across the years is more dear to the heart of Christendom than that in which, with the swift seizure of a divine insight, Jesus unfolds the very heart of the scene about

him in the words: 'Behold the birds of the heaven, that they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; and yet your Heavenly Father feedeth them. . . . Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin; yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.' Here is nature-teaching that has no parallel. So long as birds fly, this lesson will fly with them; so long as flowers bloom, this word will bloom in them. Nor does this passage stand alone. Throughout Jesus's teaching run the roots of nature symbolism and analogy, holding it fast to reality and supplying it with unfading verdure and moral beauty. On the purely scientific side of nature he did not touch; it was the moral, the spiritual interpretation of nature, as it stands related to the life of the soul, with which he was concerned. Here we may accept his word as final. And what is that word? It is that nature is God's—full of his thought and of his love. Not even a sparrow, says Jesus, can fall to the ground 'without your Father'—words these of infinite significance and tenderness, and of larger meaning than has ever yet been drawn from them. Few and simple as are the words of Jesus concerning the meaning of nature, the light which they throw upon nature will never cease to invest it with spiritual significance and moral beauty and make it, when rightly interpreted, a revelation of the Heavenly Father's goodness and love."<sup>1</sup>

The author of the following beautiful lines, S. Hall Young, may have had in mind another interpreter of nature, but they seem most appropriate when applied to Christ, the only perfect interpreter at once of nature and nature's God:

He lived aloft, apart. He talked with God  
In all the myriad tongues of God's sweet world;  
But still he came anear and talked with us,  
Interpreting for God to listening men.

### 3. *Through Things Beautiful to God*

There are some paths to God which so blend physical nature and human nature as to combine that which is highest and best in each. God is revealed in things beautiful in nature not less

<sup>1</sup> "Christ and the Eternal Order," by J. W. Buckham.

than in that which is useful, and most things in nature combine the useful and the beautiful. God is the author of beauty, and in human art we are but imitating the divine Artist. God has made man to admire the beautiful and has made beautiful things to abound in the world for him to admire. God is the greatest of all artists, and it is his will that all things beautiful in nature should lead the beholder to adore him who asks of us, his children, that we worship him in the beauty of holiness. If with the eye of an artist we look upon the landscapes of our earth and see in their forms and colours and various combinations that pleasing something that we call beauty, we cannot fail to find ourselves travelling through fields and forests, through foliage and flowers, along winding valleys and flowering streams, over hills and mountains, towards the dwelling place of that invisible Being who is the Creator at once of that holiness of beauty and that beauty of holiness which reveals his own nature. From the beautiful in nature man learns what beauty is and becomes an admirer and lover of the beautiful, so much so that the beautiful in nature becomes, for many souls at least, the most pleasing of all pathways to God; and the beautiful in art becomes a most fitting and effective method of expressing what is ethical and holy and Godlike. All beautiful things alike in nature and in art—whether found in the pleasing combinations of colour, or the harmony of sounds as in music, or in the impressive objects in physical nature, or the stately and imposing structures of architecture, or in the pleasing flow of words and phrases as seen in poetry—in short all objects of beauty, all lovely things, are channels of thought and emotion that lead the devout soul to him who in creating our world made things not only useful but beautiful.

The value of nature as a revealer of God is most appreciated by those who know God in and through a deep and soul-satisfying personal experience. Finding God in nature deepens and enriches the religious experience which any one is already enjoying. Nature and grace when thus associated in religious experience reinforce each other as aids to faith and worship. How much more beautiful and divinely glorious nature ap-

pears to a new-born soul after his conversion than it did when his sins were yet unrepented of and unforgiven, and his eyes were beclouded by sin and guilt. "Those who fail to find God in the material creation," says Dr. R. W. Dale, "and who think of him as active only in the spiritual world, will not be likely to find him in their common life, in which they are constantly dealing with material things. They will cultivate an artificial and pernicious form of spirituality. They will think of religion as consisting exclusively in prayer and worship and meditation on things unseen. Commerce and the pursuits of industry will be withdrawn from God's control. Their morals will not be Christian morals. If the husbandman is to make his ploughing and sowing and reaping part of the service which he renders to God, he must find God in the material world; he cannot work with God in his husbandry unless he sees God is working with him in the life of the seed and in the gracious powers of the soil, of the sun's heat, and of the rain. Let us not, therefore, deprecate the worth of that knowledge of God which is given to us through the visible and material creation, even though there be other and higher forms of divine activity through which God reveals himself more perfectly to rational and spiritual beings." He who accustoms himself to commune with God in nature will never lack for a glorious temple in which to worship, nor for a song of thanksgiving and praise.

To no students of nature do we owe more for the vision they get and give of God than to the poets. To them, many of them at least, nature is a beautiful and luminous pathway leading to a vision of God that may grow brighter and brighter to the perfect day.

"Thou who hast given me eyes to see  
And love this world so fair,  
Give me a heart to find out Thee  
And read Thee everywhere."

This beautiful prayer of John Keble, the author of that noble book of devotion titled, "The Christian Year," is one that finds an echo in every truly Christian heart. He alone

will learn to "read God everywhere" who has a "heart to find God." A God-loving and God-seeking heart will find God in many places where hearts devoid of this divine instinct will never see him. They alone will get a vision of God who yearn to see him. God never reveals himself to indifferent souls nor to impure souls. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God"—shall see him here and now on the earth, and not simply hereafter in heaven—shall see him not in the spiritual world only, but in the natural world also; and the vision they have of God in nature makes of it a spiritual world, full of his presence.

That there are mysteries and difficulties in nature, things that challenge and even transcend reason, cannot be denied; but atheistic materialism presents difficulties far more numerous and serious than those involved in theism. The appeal must be to reason. Which is more reasonable, let us ask, to put mind and personality first and matter second, or to put matter first and mind and personality second—to say that Mind and Personality created matter and control it, or that Matter created and controls mind and personality? One or the other of these alternatives must be true. Surely human reason can give but one answer to this question; it imperatively demands that we choose the former alternative. The Psalmist exclaimed, and much more truly may we in the light of our new and larger knowledge of nature and its wonders exclaim: "O Lord, how manifold are thy works! In wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches!"

Among recent nature-poems which give happy expression to the tendency of the human mind to reason from nature up to nature's God is one by Claribel Weeks Avery, titled "Proof," which appeared in the New York "Christian Advocate" and may be appropriately quoted here as furnishing a brief poetic statement of the argument set forth in this chapter.:

There is a God. For when I stand  
Where earth and ocean meet,  
The great sea flings its wealth of pearl  
And flora at his feet.

There is a God. For when I kneel,  
He leans to hear my prayer,  
While little stars creep in and out  
Like fireflies through his hair.

There is a God. For when I doubt  
And most deserve his blame,  
He sends some little singing bird  
To thrill me with his name.

There is a God. For when the sea  
And sky are blank as death  
And birds are mute, he comes to me  
So near I hear his breath.

CHAPTER FIVE  
THROUGH SCIENCE TO GOD



## CHAPTER FIVE

### THROUGH SCIENCE TO GOD

Let us turn now to the study of nature made by the men of science whose business it is to discover and formulate the laws of nature. We have already, in the preceding chapter, gotten into their company and have been journeying with them, more or less closely, in a territory peculiarly their own.

"O God, I think thy thoughts after thee!" exclaimed Kepler, the great scientist, once when, in studying the movements of the heavenly bodies, the glories of the physical universe came to him like a revelation from the Infinite Mind. The laws of nature are an expression of the thoughts of God. The significance of science is found in the fact that it is the thought of God interpreted and expressed in terms of human thought. To study nature and interpret it correctly is to discover God. Only a few men, however, are scientists and philosophers. All men have some knowledge of nature and are capable of drawing inferences from the knowledge they have. But the scientist is he who has, or is supposed to have, a full and accurate knowledge of the facts and underlying principles of the great world of nature round about us. Assuming that an ordinary knowledge of nature generally leads one's thoughts to God as we endeavoured to show in the last chapter, let us now inquire if a deeper and broader knowledge of nature, such as only scientists have, leads to a materialistic and atheistic conception of the world? Some have said that this is the case. We will let scientists themselves answer this question in the course of this chapter.

#### I

##### WHAT IS SCIENCE?

Science, in the sense in which we here use the term, means knowledge gained by systematic observation, experiment and

reasoning, the results of which are co-ordinated, arranged and systematised. It is particularly with reference to systematised knowledge pertaining to the natural and physical world that we are here using the term. "Since all phenomena which have been sufficiently examined are found to take place with regularity, each having certain fixed conditions, positive and negative, on the occurrence of which it invariably happens, mankind have been able to ascertain the conditions of the occurrence of many phenomena; and the progress of science mainly consists in ascertaining these conditions."

So confident is the scientist's belief in the uniformity and regularity of the operation of the laws of nature, that he makes his calculations with confidence as to what has occurred in the past and what, under similar conditions, will occur in the future. It is particularly because of the scientist's inferences as to what has occurred in the past in the realm of nature and natural law that a conflict has at times arisen between the teachings of theologians based on their interpretations of the Bible and the opinions of scientists based on their confident conviction that the laws of nature have operated in the past just as they are operating now—without interruption from any other sources or forces than those now observed to be in operation.

### *i. The Purpose of Science*

Most scientists seek only for the natural causes of natural events and consider that they have fully explained anything in nature when they have discovered and stated such cause. "Explanation in natural science means," to quote a scientific authority, "to state the law according to which a given phenomenon is connected with other phenomena, so that the entrance of the one may be foreseen from the appearance of the others. The highest principle of all modern natural science is the principle of the conservation of energy."

The theistic scientist seeks none the less because of his being a theist for the natural cause of every occurrence, and states it none the less clearly than does the anti-theistic scientist; but he does not stop with this natural cause as if it

was the full and final explanation of it. He sees something back of and beyond the natural cause, and so he feels that "The object of science is or ought to be not merely to describe phenomena and to sort and label them, but to perceive their intellectual relations; and that means to perceive the Infinite Intellect which has prearranged them and is revealed in and by them."

## *2. Scientists the Proper Teachers of Science*

For our knowledge of matters in the realm of science most of us are dependent upon scientists, the men who know, or are supposed to know, the facts pertaining to the respective phases and departments of nature to a study of which they devote their lives. Experts and specialists who investigate carefully, who gather all the facts and weigh all the evidence in their respective fields of labour, are the men to whom we should look for opinions and conclusions that may be relied upon as most worthy of acceptance. It ill behooves those who know little of science to set up their opinions against those who know much and who are truth seekers in every sense as truly as are Bible students and theologians. The Bible was not written to teach science and is in no sense a scientific book, and no amount of knowledge of the Bible on our part justifies us in using its statements to offset and refute the well-accredited conclusions of students and teachers of science whose knowledge of their specialties gives them a right to speak and to be heard.

Most of the sciences have begun first with hypotheses, which, when tried and found to work, have become scientific theories, and these when applied and proved have come to be recognised as accredited science. There may be much difference of opinion even among scientists as to the value of a mere hypothesis; and even when, as a working hypothesis, it has been successfully tried and has had some scientists to adopt it as a true theory, other scientists may still not be satisfied and may for a time refuse to accept it. If it should happen that the great body of well-accredited scientists come to be agreed as to the truth of a particular scientific theory, and a considerable num-

ber of churchmen and ecclesiastics not only refuse to accept it but take the unyielding position that such scientific theory must be rejected because it is contradicted by certain teachings of the Bible and the traditional Church creeds, then a serious situation is precipitated. Which of the two—the new science or traditional theology—is going to be compelled to yield? The history of the warfare that has ever and anon occurred in the past between science and traditional religious beliefs proves that well-accredited science has always held its own, and religious beliefs have been readjusted and brought into conformity with its teachings.

There is no more romantic and fascinating story in all literature than that which records the results of the labours and discoveries of modern scientists.<sup>1</sup> We cannot more effectively set forth our reasons for believing that intelligence enters into and reigns throughout this world of ours,—that it is God's world and that God is in his world—than by gathering from the writings of scientific authors some of the most interesting and marvellous facts and phenomena of nature which they describe.

So marvellous, so bewildering and so all but inconceivable, are many of these facts (for example, those pertaining to the size, numbers and motion of atoms and electrons) that they could but be regarded as creations of the imagination, and unbelievable, were they not taken directly from men of science and supported by their authority. The studies of nature, of matter, its elements and atoms, during the past half century has added so much to man's previous knowledge that it is quite common to speak of it as "the new knowledge" of nature, or as "the new idea" of matter, of atoms and energy.

<sup>1</sup> Nowhere perhaps has this story been told in a more interesting manner than by Professor J. Arthur Thomson of Aberdeen, Scotland, in a work already referred to, "The Outline of Science." We hereby acknowledge our indebtedness to this valuable work for facts here presented.

"The teachers of divinity to the coming age," says Dr. Newman Smyth, "will need, as an essential element of the instruction in schools of theology, a working knowledge of modern methods of scientific inquiry. Some acquaintance especially with biological studies and results should be made a required part of any thorough education for the modern ministry of the word of life." ("Through Science to Faith.")

## II

THE DIFFERENT SCIENCES AS RELATED TO FAITH  
IN A PERSONAL GOD

There are some sciences the study of which, more than perhaps is true of others, leads the human mind to the conviction that what we call nature cannot be explained on any other hypothesis than that of an intelligent personal Creator and Governor of the Universe. Even if it must be admitted that this hypothesis does not offer an entirely satisfactory answer to and explanation of all the questions raised, it answers many more of these questions than does any other hypothesis—and this is treating the conception of a Divine Creator simply as a scientific hypothesis wholly apart from the question of divine revelation.

*I. Through Astronomy to God*

“Two things,” said Immanuel Kant, “fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe the oftener and the more steadily they are contemplated, the starry heavens above me, and the moral law within me.” This means that this greatest of modern philosophers travelled “through nature to God” and then “through man to God,” just as we are doing in these studies. Let us turn now to a consideration of the first of the two things that so profoundly impressed him, the starry heavens.

Among the most mysterious facts and forces of the physical universe is the law of gravitation, which assumes that every particle of matter attracts every other throughout the universe. It was Sir Isaac Newton who first worked out in mathematical terms of marvellous accuracy and universality of application the operations of this wonderful law. Without a knowledge of this law astronomy could never have become a science. Many important and interesting facts concerning the heavenly bodies may be named which serve to show how truly to men in our day, as to those living in former ages, astronomy rightly interpreted is a pathway to God.

The spectroscope has been called "the greatest instrument ever devised by the brain and hand of man," and this because it reveals to us the physical elements that enter into the constitution of the sun and the stars. It will detect a particle of matter so small as the millionth part of a milligram; will reveal the nature of forms of matter trillions of miles away and measure the velocity with which the forms of matter are moving through space. Astronomers have devised many other instruments to enable them to gain accurate information concerning the heavenly bodies, some of which are developed to a point of refinement and exactitude that would be regarded as incredible but for the fact that their accuracy can be and is demonstrated beyond the possibility of question. The chief value of the spectroscope consists in its power to analyse light into its constituent elements and colours. Sodium, iron, copper, zinc, magnesium and other elementary substances found in our earth are in this way proved to be in the sun. Each substance when it has been made luminous and incandescent displays its own specific and individual colour. The light that comes from the sun we call white light; but this light comes not from any one luminous substance alone, but from several substances intermingled and blended in an incandescent state. The spectroscope (the simplest and most familiar forms of which are found in the glass prism and the rainbow) analyses this white light of the sun into seven primary colours, viz.: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet. Reverse the process and blend rays of light representing these seven colours into one, and it will make white light like that of the sun.

While all the constituent elements found in our earth were soon found by the spectrum analysis to be also in the sun, as far back as 1868 a close observation revealed a certain light emanating from prominences on the sun which indicated the presence there of a gaseous substance which was not known to exist in our earth. Scientists named it helium (from *helios*, the Greek word for sun), and began searching for the same substance here in our earth, and in 1895 Sir William Ramsay's researches were rewarded by the discovery of this

hitherto unknown element in our planet. The solar spectrum reveals in its analysis of light taken directly from the corona of the sun still another substance as present there which, if it be present in our earth, has not yet been discovered. It is called coronium. It remains to be seen who among our scientists will add another jewel to the fair and already luminous crown of science by discovering coronium hid away in some mineral pocket of the earth.

Modern astronomers explain the Milky Way by saying that it represents clusters and constellations of starry worlds arranged approximately in the form of an enormous disc, possibly with some spiral features characterising its form; and that our solar system is either in the centre of this disc which constitutes our universe, or at most only a few hundred trillions of miles distant from the actual centre. As we look along the plane of this star-studded disc in any direction, the worlds of light are so numerous as to make the field of vision look like white silvery clouds of light, whereas if we look out at right angles to this starry disc in any direction the worlds of light are much less numerous and may be seen singly and apart from each other.

These are some of the many facts that may be named which serve to explain why it is that astronomy stands first among the sciences, the study of which leads to God. Its innumerable worlds and immeasurable distances give us, as nothing else does or can, the idea of the Infinite. The study of the heavenly bodies—of the solar system, with its planets all moving in perfect harmony and adjustment to each other; the countless stars, all of which are doubtless centres of solar systems like our own, and all so perfectly adjusted to each other that each influences and is in turn influenced by all the others; the beauty, the glory, the sense of the infinite that is awakened in the soul as the eye takes in the heavenly vision—this contemplation of the heavens, as we have already pointed out, has perhaps from the beginning of time led more thoughtful and studious minds to belief in the existence of a Divine Being than any other phase of the study of nature. In a workshop so vast where everything is working and moving in the most

perfect harmony there must be a worker. In a house so spacious and glorious there must be an inhabitant. It is unthinkable that there should be a universe so infinite in its extension and in its contents as astronomy reveals without an infinite Personality to give it rational interpretation and spiritual significance.

## *2. Through Physics and Chemistry to God*

The sciences of physics and of chemistry may be distinguished from each other, but they cannot be separated. Each has to do with matter and its properties as represented in the ninety-two elements of nature with their atoms and molecules. For our present purpose, which is the consideration of physical nature in its relation to a causative and controlling Intelligence, it is needful that we bring together a number of facts that science has collected and correlated, and find out, if we can, whether they point to or away from God.

When scientists tell us that an atom of hydrogen in water at the freezing point is moving at the rate of seventy miles a minute, we can conceive what it means even though we cannot understand how that marvellous mechanical operation can be going on in the freezing pool of water before our very eyes and we see nothing of it. But when they tell us further, as they do, that each and every one of these particles of hydrogen at this freezing moment is having seventeen billion and seven hundred million collisions with other particles every second, they are saying something that we not only cannot understand, but which we cannot even conceive.

With the discovery of the X-Ray and radium, and the resultant revelation that "atoms of matter are continually sending forth exceedingly small particles or sparks of radiant-matter called electrons," physics and chemistry are said to have entered upon a new era of development which promises in due time to contribute much to our knowledge of nature and our power to turn its energies and forces to the beneficent service of mankind.

"Experiments have proved that well-nigh every form of

matter can be stimulated to the point of radio-activity where it will emit rays and send forth electrons. Every glowing metal is pouring out a stream of electrons. Every arc-lamp is discharging them. Every clap of thunder means a shower of them. Every star is flooding space with them. The sun is constantly pouring out vast streams of them." "An electron can only maintain a separate existence if it is travelling at an immense velocity—from ten to a hundred thousand miles a second. If it moves at less than six hundred miles a second the electron sticks to the first atom it meets. Because electrons are attracted by magnets just like electricity they are supposed to be of an electrical nature. The identification of these electrons with electricity is about all that as yet has been definitely settled concerning them; but this does not explain what electricity is—it has only brought the physicist one step nearer the discovery of what it is."

"The fact that these electrons are in a state of violent motion or strain is proof that a vast amount of energy is locked up in atoms of matter. Half a brick, it is said, contains as much energy as a small coal-field. It is believed, however, by many scientists that some day the secret will be discovered how the energy that is stored in atoms can be released, harnessed and utilised. If that expectation should ever be realised, the economic, industrial and social face of the world will be transformed."<sup>1</sup>

Among the wonders of the age of science in which we live we must not fail to mention the marvellous instruments which scientists have invented and constructed for making their experiments and testing their theories. For instance, when they invented scales so delicately poised as to give accurately the weight of the ink or lead mark adhering to a sheet of paper in writing a single word with a pen or pencil, it was thought to be the limit of inventive genius. But another instrument, the spectroscope, was found to detect a quantity of matter four million times smaller than enters into that black mark placed on the paper; and there is yet another instrument, called the electroscope, that is said to be a million times more sensitive

<sup>1</sup> See Thomson's "Outline of Science," from which these statements are culled.

than the spectroscope. Ordinary house thermometers register the rise or fall of the temperature for every degree or half degree change in the heat or cold; but scientists have an instrument called the bolometer, that will record, it is said, even one millionth of one degree of change in heat or cold. But these are only specimens of hundreds of instruments which have been constructed for studying nature and discovering its secrets; and we glory in them as proofs and triumphs of intelligence and genius on the part of those who not only invented them but used them to find out the facts of nature hitherto unknown to men. But can it be that it takes mind of the very highest order of intelligence to invent instruments and to use them for the discovery of things in nature, hidden laws and secret forces, and to interpret and use them for wise and beneficent purposes, and yet the things themselves, nature's elements and atoms and forces, sustain no relation to a creative and controlling Intelligence? Can intelligence interpret what intelligence had nothing to do with designing and doing? To answer this question rationally is to think through nature to God.

### *3. Through Geology to God*

If we can ascend to God through astronomy and a study of the heavenly bodies, it is none the less true that we can descend to God through geology and a study of our planet as revealed in the strata that form the earth's surface. Indeed it is these stony strata of the earth's surface that reveal, as nothing else in nature does, the age and the gradual development through geologic eras of our world and of our entire solar and planetary system. At least such is the testimony of one of the greatest of American geologists, "My first contact with natural science," says Dr. N. S. Shaler, the late distinguished and scholarly professor of Geology in Harvard University, "had the not uncommon effect of leading me far away from Christianity. Of late years a further insight into the truths of nature has gradually forced me back again towards the ground from which I had departed. And I think I am not mistaken in believing that my own experience represents the course which

many other naturalists are more or less consciously following. Beginning with the simpler and apparently mechanical facts with which they have to deal, inquirers into natural phenomena are at first almost necessarily led to conceive nature as a great engine, which can be explained as we account for a combination of wheels and levers. Gradually, as they are forced to more extended views of their subject-matter, they perceive that this simple explanation is unsatisfactory. Without conscious argument, moved merely by the weight of the truths which are insensibly driven in upon them, they find their conceptions enlarging; and they are compelled to suppose a kind of control operating in their world which is not purely dynamic. When they attain this position, it seems to me to be time for them to examine the ground they occupy, with a view to finding what is its relation to that held by the older schools of interpretation, those which we call the theological. The matter which I have to present to you in these lectures is directed to this end. But in this presentation I approach the matter from my own point of view, my aim being to show the state of mind to which the student of natural phenomena is brought by influences which are entirely independent of theological opinions."

"The first stage of natural inquiry led men of science to the curious and undeclared assumption that the visible was the essential part of the universe. As inquiries, however, have gone deeper into the realm of causation, especially as the conditions of organic life have been made the subject of more penetrating study, the sense of the profundity of natural law has been continually enhanced. Naturalists are being driven step by step to hypothecate the presence in the universe of conditions which are best explained by the supposition that the direction of affairs is in the control of something like our own intelligence. Whoever will inform himself as to the trend of modern science will see that even where the votaries of the new learning are most indisposed to recognise the increasing measure of their theistic motives, the increase is nevertheless discernible. In other words, it seems to me that the naturalist is coming more and more to approach the

position of the philosophical theologian by paths which at first seemed to lie far apart from his domain."<sup>1</sup>

#### 4. *Through Biology to God*

"What a wonderful imagination God the Creator must have!" Thus exclaimed the poet laureate of England once while contemplating the many manifestations around him of the mind of God revealed in nature. Linnæus once said, "There are as many different species as there were ideas in the Divine Mind." No modern theist would venture to put such a limitation to the "ideas in the Divine Mind" as seems to be involved in this utterance attributed to Linnæus. But it is quite certain that modern science has given to modern biologists and botanists such a conception of the extent and boundlessness of the forms of life, of living germs and life-cells within life, as would lead Linnæus, were he living to-day, greatly to enlarge his estimate of the number of ideas in the Divine Mind. This can be best shown by presenting some facts and statements gathered from the writings of modern scientists.

The different kinds of living creatures amount to hundreds of thousands, each with a definite individuality of its own. There are, we are told, twenty-five thousand different species of animals with backbones, and ten times as many different species (mostly insects) that are without backbones. And there are about as many different species of plants as there are of animals—so botanists tell us. For every species of plant life that is common and conspicuous there are said to be twenty that are inconspicuous and rarely seen; and for every species of animal life that is visible there are said to be a hundred that are unseen.

The why and wherefore of all these myriads of living creatures—what the "idea in the Divine Mind" was that led God to create them or have nature give birth and being to them—may forever remain an impenetrable secret of nature, an incomprehensible mystery hidden from men. But certain it is

<sup>1</sup> "The Interpretation of Nature." See also the quotation from Dr. Winchell in the next chapter.

that the mystery is not rendered less marvellous or more comprehensible by assuming and asserting that all is due to mindless matter and that God has had nothing to do with it. On the contrary, life as it appears in the vegetable and animal world even more than physics or chemistry, and more than astronomy or geology, calls for such an intelligence as is found only in a living personal God as the only satisfactory explanation of the origin and continued maintenance of conditions that make life not only possible but superabounding. And the continuance of life, when all its conditions are considered, scarcely less than the origin of life, demands a living God. Let us note a few of these conditions of life on our planet that make us marvel at the fact of life and its mysteries, and make us feel that they can best be described as originating in and guided by Intelligence—the theist regards them as “providential,” and this none the less because they may be instances of “adaption to environment” concerning which evolutionists have so much to say. There is no way in which intelligence manifests itself more than in adaptation to environment—and the more extended in time and comprehensive in detail the adaptation, the more manifest is the intelligence.

It is a well known fact that carbon is an element of nature that enters into all organic substances and is an essential of life. Combined with oxygen it makes carbonic acid gas which is essential to plant life, and is healthful if taken into the human stomach but is poison if inhaled in large quantities into the human lungs. There is a small quantity of carbonic acid gas in the air that we breathe, which is composed mainly of nitrogen and oxygen, but the quantity is so small (only one gallon in every twenty-five hundred gallons of air) that it is not detrimental to human life. It is absolutely necessary that there should be this amount of carbonic acid gas in the air, no more and no less, to maintain the equilibrium necessary for animal and vegetable life; if there were more, man could not live in it, and, if there were less, vegetable life that ministers to human life could not exist in it.

Consider, again, the relation of life to the matter of heat and cold as it is found in the solar system, and on our planet.

The temperature of the sun is estimated to represent not less than a hundred thousand degrees of heat, while the space intervening between the sun and the earth is thought by scientists to be hundreds of degrees below zero. The heat of the earth at its molten center is placed by scientists at approximately ten thousand degrees. Organic life demands a temperature not less than thirty-two (freezing point) and not higher than about one hundred and thirty-two degrees—that is, it has a possible range of only about one hundred degrees in which it can be permanently maintained here upon the surface of the earth. Or, if we may represent it longitudinally, let us draw a line a mile and a half long (which is equal to seven thousand, nine hundred and twenty feet) to represent the heat of the sun, and mark off eight feet on that line, and this will represent the one hundred degrees range of heat which life requires on our planet as compared with the maximum temperature of our solar source of heat.

It is easy to see how quickly life would become extinct if any considerable increase in the quantity of carbonic acid gas in our air should take place, or if any considerable quantity of the vast pent-up store of heat in the sun or in the center of the earth should be turned loose upon our planet. David once exclaimed, "There is but one step between me and death." If these statements which I have made, and all of which I have taken from scientific sources, are even approximately true, we need only to add to our earth's surface enough heat from the sun, or from the earth's hot center, to represent an addition of three feet to the eight-foot section of that mile and a half line, to make it true that there is but one step between all living things and death! We cannot wonder at a poet exclaiming:

"O God, on what a slender thread  
Hang all created things!"

We find another most remarkable adjustment of physical conditions whereby life is made possible in the case of freezing water, a case of "concurrence" which we cannot think just happened to be so by accident and chance. We will let Dr.

Josiah Parsons Cook, the late eminent Professor of Chemistry in Harvard University, describe these conditions and their consequences. We quote from his notable volume titled "Religion and Chemistry."

"The surface water, as it cools below this temperature [39°] remains at the top, and in the end freezes; but then comes into play still another provision in the properties of water. Most substances are heavier in their solid than in their liquid state; but ice, on the contrary, is lighter than water, and therefore floats on its surface. Moreover, as ice is a very poor conductor of heat, it serves as a protection to the lake, so that, at the depth of a few feet at most, the temperature of the water during winter is never under 40°, although the atmosphere may continue for weeks below zero. If water resembled other liquids, and continued to contract with cold to its freezing point; if this exception had not been made, the whole order of nature would have been reversed. The circulation [which exists above 40°] would continue until the whole mass of water in the lake had fallen to the freezing point. The ice would then first form at the bottom, and the congelation would then continue until the whole lake had been changed into one mass of solid ice. Upon such a mass the hottest summer would produce but little effect. . . . It is unnecessary to state that this condition of things would be utterly inconsistent with the existence of aquatic plants or animals, and it would be almost as fatal to organic life everywhere; for not only are all parts of the creation so indissolubly bound together that if one member suffers all the other members suffer with it, but, moreover, the soil itself would to a certain extent share in the fate of the ponds. . . . Thus, then, it appears that the very existence of life in these temperate regions of the earth depends on an apparent exception to a general law of nature so slight and limited in its extent that it can only be detected by the most refined scientific observation."<sup>1</sup>

We note yet a fourth feature of our physical world that ministers to life and without which life would not be possible—and that is inertia. One of the properties of matter is inertia

<sup>1</sup> "Religion and Chemistry," revised edition (1886), pp. 149-151.

by virtue of which it remains at rest unless something other than itself moves it. Now we are told by astronomers that all the heavenly bodies in the universe are in motion, and by the physicists in keeping with the new conception of matter that atoms of every kind are radiant-matter (either actually or potentially so) which is continually throwing off electrons. The planets we learn have a three-fold motion, revolving around the central sun, rotating upon their axes and then, along with the sun, participating in that cosmic motion that characterises all the stars and solar systems of the universe. In the infinitely great world of astronomy and the infinitesimally minute world of the physical atom nothing is at rest—everything is moving, and this motion alike of the stars and of the atomic electrons is so rapid it can only be approximately measured or computed. How fortunate it is, now, that between the ever-moving tiny corpuscles that compose atoms and the ever-moving planets and stars of heaven,—between the greatest and the minutest forms of existence,—there come many material bodies, or aggregations of matter, which are at rest, are inert,—without power to move. But for this fact, life of every kind would be impossible on our planet. If it be true, therefore, that motion and force are everywhere present and regnant throughout the universe, it is also true that this great and all-pervading law of nature is checked in its operation and balanced by another beneficent law, that of the inertia of matter. If, because of the one law we "live and move," and are continually "becoming," because of the other law, that of the inertia of many things, we "have our being," and can know what rest is. He who himself wrought six days in creation and rested on the seventh, said to man "six days shalt thou work, and on the seventh thou shalt rest," and in so doing he recognised the essential place of rest in the life of man. The inertia of matter is not a symbol of death and unconsciousness but of the rest that follows toil. By the inertia of matter the God of life has made life possible for his creatures, however true it be that their life is dependent on motion and manifests itself in ceaseless motion.

Our survey of these sciences leads to the conclusion that if the existence of an immanent Intelligence, an always and everywhere active God, be offered and tried out as nothing more than a rational, scientific working hypothesis to account for the origin and continuous operations of nature and its laws, it not only is not contradicted by any facts of nature but furnishes a rational explanation of most of the facts far more satisfactory than does any other scientific hypothesis. It is infinitely more satisfying to the mind of every rightly reasoning man than atheism is.

### III

#### SCIENCE AND CHRISTIAN FAITH

The foregoing presentation of some of the many marvellous facts of animate and inanimate nature which modern science has made known to us prepares us for a consideration of the question as to whether or not the scientific conception of nature as under the reign of regular and uniform law is in conflict with theistic faith in a personal God related to nature as its Creator and Governor.

##### *I. Science and the Bible*

A generation ago we heard much about the contradiction between Science and the Bible. Those who recognised this contradiction as real were divided into two groups, namely, dogmatic theologians and dogmatic scientists. The former said that because of this contradiction, science must be false; the latter said, because of this contradiction, the Bible could not be a true and inspired book. The present generation has found that the contradiction was not between nature and the Bible, but between man's interpretation of nature and the prevalent interpretation of the Bible. When both were rightly interpreted the contradiction disappeared.

“Whoever says that he lost God through studying nature never really possessed him,” some one has truly said. Men may learn infidelity from other men and from books, but they

can never learn it from nature, if it be rightly interpreted. Nature reveals God as truly as a building reveals the mind of the architect who planned it and the workman who executed the plan. While it is true that the Bible and nature, when both are rightly interpreted, cannot possibly contradict each other, many things in nature do contradict what men have read into the Bible. On the contrary, the Bible is full of nature and of the relation of nature to both God and man; nature is the meeting place between God and man. In finding nature a path that leads unerringly to God, all who believe in the validity of reasoning through nature to nature's God are in accord, and this regardless of whether they be simple unlettered believers or learned theologians and skilled scientists.

"Where science begins faith ends," said one who thought he found in the scientific study of nature a path that leads not to but away from faith in God. That not a few modern scientists have been materialists and atheists cannot be denied; but of many of these it may be said that they disguised rather than denied the existence of God.

Among the early and influential leaders of the Christian Church who recognised that the Bible was not meant to teach science and should not be quoted in opposition to it was St. Augustine. "There are some questions," said St. Augustine, "pertaining to the earth or the sky or other elements of this world, respecting which one who is not a Christian believer may have knowledge derived from careful observation and from the most certain reasoning; and it is mischievous and disgraceful, and of all things to be carefully avoided, that a Christian, speaking of such matters as according to or contrary to the Scriptures, should be heard by an unbeliever talking such nonsense that the unbeliever, perceiving him to be as wide from the mark as the east is from the west, can hardly restrain himself from laughing in derision."

Ptolemy worked out a scheme of astronomy and made the earth the centre of the solar system; and notwithstanding the fact that all the stars of heaven in their courses fought against

his scheme more than they fought against Sisera, people long believed it, and because it was traditionally orthodox as science and in accord with the Bible as then interpreted, men of that day doubtless congratulated themselves on the harmony between science and the Bible. And then when Copernicus and Galileo devised a different scheme, and made the sun the centre, notwithstanding the fact that every movement of the heavenly bodies accorded with their theory, these men and their followers were anathematised and denounced as heretics, not because their new theory lacked confirmatory proof, but because their views were out of accord with traditional orthodoxy and the Bible as then interpreted. And yet truth was on their side; and won the day—was bound to win, because it was the truth about nature. But men did not thereupon deny the Bible; they simply changed their method of interpreting the Bible. The Bible is a source-book of religion, not of science.

To tie the Bible up with any theories of science, in any of its departments or spheres, or with any theories of ethics, as held in any period of history, is to imperil its authority in the only realm where we may properly claim that it is an authority, namely, in the realm of religion where it is found to be of the highest value as a progressive revelation and progressive interpretation of the nature and will of God. Thus interpreted the Bible has no conflict with science.

“In general,” says Professor George P. Fisher, “we find that the Bible confines itself to this circle of truths (moral and religious truths). The ideas of nature, apart from its direct religious bearings, are such as contemporary knowledge had attained. The geography, the astronomy, the meteorology, the geology of the Scriptural authors are on the plane of their times. Copernicus and Columbus, Aristotle and Newton, are not anticipated. The Bible renders unto science the things of science. If we glance at the history of the interpretation of the first chapter of Genesis, we shall find that the meaning given to it in different periods is generally matched to the science of the day.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “Grounds of Theistic and Christian Belief,” p. 442.

Dr. G. A. Johnston Ross, writing concerning the true Christian attitude towards modern science, says:

"It is my conviction that two classes of people in particular have a just complaint to make against the gaps in our preaching upon nature: first, the scientific student of nature and investigator into its secrets, the man in the physical laboratory who yesterday mocked at our religion and to-day is our teacher and rebuke in reverence. Behind the whole bad business of the debate between science and religion lay the disastrous failure on the part of the religionist to teach the *divinity of science*, a failure to claim the fields and virtues of patient, honest scientific research as part of the area and workings of God's Holy Spirit. Had that been done; had we preachers, instead of ecclesiasticising God's Holy Spirit, been faithful to the broad and comprehensive view of the field of His operations which we inherit from the prophets of Israel, there had never arisen the baneful notion that science stands outside religion, that the things we see and touch are less sacred and sacramental than the things we think and hope. There is no reason to believe that the Church will be able to recover its lost members among the students of science until she gives up the partialities of her theism and frankly recognises that the God of the laboratory and the God of the prayer-meeting are one."

## 2. *The Faith of Scientists*

In refutation of the claim sometimes made that the scientific study of nature is atheistic in its tendencies, it is easy to call up a cloud of witnesses, who have been devout believers in God and the Bible and the Christian Church, and have yet at the same time been devoted students of nature and have, as a result of their successful labours, earned recognition as great scientists, than whom no greater can be named: Copernicus, Galileo, Tycho Brahe, Humboldt, John Kepler, Isaac Newton, Michael Faraday, James Clerk Maxwell, and others just as great who are now living.

The late Prof. George J. Romanes was an eminent scientist. In the earlier part of his life he was a pronounced disbeliever

in Christianity and wrote a book in which he undertook to show how utterly impossible it was to prove the existence of God. He claimed that none of the arguments commonly relied upon by theists to prove the existence of a Divine Being were convincing to reason or at all satisfactory to a scientific mind. Later in life, however, after many years spent in the study of nature as a scientist, he became convinced that infidelity and atheism involved more difficulties than theism, and his volume titled "Thoughts on Religion," published just after his death, not only retracts his former unjust criticisms upon theism, but presents some of the strong, positive evidences which led him to change his mind and declare his faith in the existence of God and the divinity of Christ. Hear his conclusion and his explanation of his former disbelief: "By no logical artifice can we escape from the conclusion that, so far as we can see, this universal order must be regarded as due to some one integrating principle, and that this, so far as we can see, is most probably of the nature of mind. . . . At one time it seemed to me impossible that any proposition, verbally intelligible as such, could be more violently absurd than that of the doctrine of the incarnation. Now I see that this standpoint is wholly irrational, due only to the blindness of reason itself promoted by purely scientific habits of thought. . . . In every generation it must henceforth become more and more recognised by logical thinkers that all antecedent objections to Christianity founded upon reason alone are *ipso facto* nugatory. . . . Neither philosophy, science, nor poetry has ever produced results in thought, conduct, or beauty in any degree to be compared with it. Only to a man wholly destitute of spiritual perception can it be that Christianity should fail to appear the greatest exhibition of the beautiful and the sublime, and of all else that appeals to our spiritual nature, which has ever been known upon earth. What has all the science or all the philosophy of the world done for the thought of mankind to be compared with the one doctrine, God is love?" Romanes was an honest truth seeker, and that means, whether consciously or unconsciously, a seeker after God. In

the closing years of his life there came to him that for which the great poet laureate of England prayed—"a new vision of God."

On the tombstones of Louis Pasteur, who was known as a deeply religious man, are inscribed words which he had himself written in life: "Happy is he who carries a God within him, an ideal of beauty to which he is obedient—an ideal of art, an ideal of science, an ideal of the fatherland, an ideal of the virtues of the Gospel." The last century produced no greater English scientist than Lord Kelvin, who said: "Science is not antagonistic but helpful to religion. If you think strongly enough you will be forced by science to the belief in God which is the foundation of all religion. I believe that the more thoroughly science is studied the further does it take us from anything comparable to atheism."

If one should be called on to furnish an ideal example of a man who combined in himself all that is highest and best in Christian character and culture, in literary and scientific scholarship, who was a believer both in God and in the scientific doctrine of evolution, the name that would probably come first of all to his mind would be that of Henry Drummond. His "Ascent of Man" is an ascent to God at the same time that it represents the development of man from lower forms of life in and through evolution, to that which is highest physically, intellectually and socially. His "best thing in the world" was love, that perfect love which has been revealed in the heart of God and in the life of Christ as the aim and end and goal of all human progress.

There is perhaps no more distinguished physicist in America than Dr. Robert A. Millikan, former professor of Physics in the University of Chicago, now of the California Institute of Technology, who enjoys the distinction of being the first scientist to succeed in isolating an electron. A confession of faith in God and in the divine-human Christ could hardly come from a scientific man in words more clear, sane, and pronounced than that to be found in a recent utterance of Dr. Millikan: "It is to me unthinkable that a real atheist should

exist at all. It seems to me as obvious as breathing that every man who is sufficiently in his senses to recognise his own inability to comprehend the problem of existence, to understand whence he himself came and whither he is going, must in the very admission of that ignorance and finiteness recognise the existence of a Something, a Power, a Being, in whom and because of whom he himself lives and moves and has his being. That Power, that Something, that Existence, we call God. . . . I am not much concerned as to whether I agree precisely with you in my conception of God or not. Both your conception and mine must in the nature of the case be vague and indefinite, for 'can men with thinking find out God.' . . . If you in your conception identify God with nature, you must perforce attribute to him consciousness and personality, or better, superconsciousness and superpersonality. You cannot possibly synthesise nature and leave out its most outstanding attributes. Nor can you get those potentialities out of nature, no matter how far back you go in time. In other words, materialism, as commonly understood, is an altogether absurd and an utterly irrational philosophy, and is indeed so regarded by most thoughtful men."

The statement of a recent writer that "on the purely scientific side of nature Christ did not touch" may be true, and yet we can but feel with Dr. Francis H. Smith of the University of Virginia, that science which concerns itself with the facts and laws of nature can never find itself out of harmony with the teachings of Christ, the greatest and truest interpreter of nature. In his Cole Lectures titled "Christ and Science," Dr. Smith says:

"With the evidence of Christ's love of nature before us, it seems strange that in so many ages of the Church Christians have looked with suspicion if not with enmity on the study of the visible creation. They feared or believed that it led away from the Master, not to him. When the honest votaries of science were led to views of the world different from those which pious people had formed from a hasty interpretation of biblical expressions never meant to teach science, they were

at once classed with the infidels, and their learning was denounced as irreligious. It is not Galileo whom in this day we look upon as wrong, but the Churchmen who condemned and pursued him. We have learned slowly that to reject a creed is not of necessity irreligious, and that honest search for truth is a Christian trait in the scientist's laboratory not less than in the Pastor's study.

"The material universe, as we know it, discloses most wonderfully the majesty and might of the Creator, while the hidings of his power in the great realm of electricity and the world of the atom are yielding to the searching of men ineffable lessons of his wisdom. The rapidly increasing knowledge of nature is bringing out into clearer light that there is a plan in the world, and hence there must have been a Designer. What the material universe taught men of God in the early ages it still teaches—with increased force and added richness. The multiplicity of facts accumulating from year to year does not impair the unity of creation. If Christ be the maker of all worlds, there must be harmony between all worlds. The unity of the creation, physical and spiritual, lies in the unity of the Creator. It will be a glorious day when the recognition of Christ as the Master of all worlds, the source and support of all activity in all spheres, shall be complete. The movement of the age is toward Christ, not away from him. The sound thinkers of the world are more and more turning toward Christ; and the day is already dawning when fair Science will cast her crown at his feet and hail the Son of Mary as the Son of God—of whom and through whom and to whom are all things."

A certain reluctance to accept the results of the scientific study of nature has characterised conservative minds in all ages of the Christian Church. It is interesting and profitable now, says G. E. Hale, "to recall the extraordinary characteristics of the mediæval mind, which tested everything new by a comparison of ancient texts, and refused to appeal to the simple and direct proof of observation or experiment. Luther and Melanthon, among other leaders of human thought, vigorously opposed the Copernican theory, the latter on the ground that 'the Holy Scriptures state that Joshua bade the sun stand still and not the earth.' But, as Pritchett has pointed

out, perhaps the most remarkable evidence of man's persistent dislike of the conception of a moving earth is afforded by the strong dissent of Francis Bacon, though truly regarded as one of the founders of modern thought. In providing the evidence which ultimately rescued the world from this deplorable state, Galileo initiated the development of modern science and stimulated the discoveries of the explorers and investigators of the Renaissance. Once more, as in the early Greek period and again in the Alexandrian School, astronomy led the way, and by its great discoveries encouraged research in all other branches of science."<sup>1</sup>

If it be true that the physical sciences have a trustworthy basis in physical nature, it is none the less true, says Professor J. M. Coulter of Chicago University, that Christianity has a scientific basis in the nature of man, and that its results can be demonstrated just as clearly and convincingly as can the results that have been proved in the field of natural science. The fact is that these two great fields, so far from being contradictory, are mutually helpful. In this way the revelation of God in nature has supplemented his revelation through Christ. From a recent volume<sup>2</sup> by Professors J. M. and M. C. Coulter we quote the following true and timely words in which these eminent theistic scientists make, with the utmost confidence, a claim for the "scientific basis" of the Christian faith:

"It is the Christian claim that God has revealed himself to man not merely in the words of Scripture, but also in the works of nature. It would seem likely, therefore, that the revelation of Scripture is supplementary to that of nature, containing further, but not contradictory, revelation. It would seem more logical, therefore, to read our knowledge of nature into our interpretation of Scripture, than to interpret nature by our conceptions of Scripture. The frequent attempts to interpret natural phenomena by conceptions derived from Scripture have so often ended disastrously that a reversal of the process might be suggested.

<sup>1</sup> "The Depths of the Universe."

<sup>2</sup> "Where Evolution and Religion Meet."

"The reason why so many scientific men believe in Christianity is that they find it to be thoroughly scientific. Religion is now known to be a universal human impulse. No race of men in any age of the world have failed to give expression to this impulse. Any universal impulse must have some function. It is clear that the most masterful human passion, and therefore the most powerful human stimulus, is love. Everything that is finest in human character and conduct is in response to the stimulus of love. Our conclusion is that the most effective ideal for the religious impulse is love stimulating service. This is the ideal of the Christian religion, and it makes scientific men choose it as the only religion with a scientific approach, no matter how much theologians, and rival church organisations, and professing Christians may confuse the issue. Furthermore, since it has selected our most masterful passion as the stimulus, it is the final religion. The great contribution which Jesus made to religion was his recognition of the master passion love as the most powerful stimulus to develop the best that is possible in man. It is no wonder that in the religion of Jesus, God is not only called Father, but is personified as Love. God is Love, that is, the master passion that can develop the best that is in us."

Should science tell me that my faith in God  
Is vain, since God is not, nor any need  
Of him, then would I banish from my creed  
All science, and take lessons from the clod—  
Which, dumb and dead, like Aaron's budded rod,  
Blooms yet, by miracle, to flowery mead,  
Where, plain, as in the Holy Book, I read  
God's power and goodness written on the sod.

Not thus has science taught my grateful soul,  
By starry gleam or secret cell explored,  
Nor bid me dash my faith against a stone:  
She buoys my faith on all the tides that roll,  
And tells me, if to loftier heights I soared,  
In farthest skies I should find God alone!

WILLIAM C. RICHARDS.

CHAPTER SIX  
EVOLUTION AND GOD



## CHAPTER SIX

### EVOLUTION AND GOD

So conspicuous and influential among scientists during the last half of the nineteenth century was the doctrine of evolution, and so dominant is it among scientists at the present time—and so bitterly and persistently has it been antagonised by theologians of the traditional school of thought from the days of Darwin to the present time,—that it seems proper and wise to single it out among the many doctrines of modern science and consider its bearing on theistic and Christian faith in our day. This scientific doctrine or theory of creation has come to be a storm centre of discussion in our day not so much between scientists and theologians as between the different schools of religious thought, the traditional and the modern, the former contending that faith in evolution is incompatible with faith in the teachings of the sacred Scriptures as to God's work and method in the creation of the world and its inhabitants, while the latter contend that there is no incompatibility whatever between faith in evolution and faith in the Scripture account of creation if the Scriptures are properly interpreted. Our present task is not to discuss the truth or error of the doctrine of evolution—that is the work of men of science. We are concerned here and now simply and only with its bearing on faith in a personal God.

#### I

##### WHAT IS EVOLUTION?

The scientific theory of evolution maintains that everything in the entire realm of nature, using that term in its largest sense, has come to be what it now is by process of development through the operation of natural law; that the past is the parent of the present and the present the offspring

of the past. The material or physical universe is composed of ninety-two or more primitive "elements," which possess certain inherent and unchangeable properties, or attributes, all of which operate in definite uniform modes which we call the laws of nature. These original primitive elements along with their properties and the laws according to which they act, have been discovered as yet only in part by man; but in so far as discovered they are definite, persistent and uniform in their operation. All things in nature are to be accounted for and explained by natural law. Everything that now exists is the effect of what preceded it and the cause of what shall follow. The lower and simpler in nature has evolved into the higher and more complex. Organic nature, including all forms of vegetable and animal life, evolved by process and power of natural law from inorganic matter.

Scientific evolution in itself alone does not undertake to settle the question as to whether matter was created or is eternal, nor whether the uniform laws of nature are original and ultimate forces or are themselves the modes according to which some intelligent, personal Being accomplishes his purposes in and with and through nature. It deals simply and only with nature and natural law; assumes nothing beyond it. Although there are gaps and missing links in the long extended chain or process by which present existing things have been developed, the evolutionist believes that nature's laws, known or unknown, account for all things being what they now are. All forms of life, vegetable and animal, have come to be what they are by adaptation to environment, and the explanation of the progress upward towards higher forms of life is found in the fact that, in the struggle for life, the strongest and fittest to survive will tend to supplant the weaker. In the lower forms of life the possession of greater brute force may indicate that which determines what is fittest to survive; but the higher we ascend in the scale of life, the determining factors in the successful struggle for existence become, not physical and brute force but the possession of certain intellectual, social, ethical and spiritual qualities that vastly outweigh the advantages of superior brute force.

*I. Materialistic and Theistic Evolution Distinguished*

The difference between materialistic and theistic evolution is to be seen in the different answers given to the question as to whether "in the *physical* energies or forces which science supposes to have preceded life there is or is not to be found the true and adequate cause of life with all its forms, its infinite possibilities, and its multitudinous activities?" "Darwin, it will be remembered, asked to be allowed to assume a first form, or a few forms, in order that he might show how the earth as it pursued its silent way through space, came to be tenanted with living beings and became the arena of all their works. But, simple as his request seemed, it was a tremendous assumption that he asked leave to make; for it meant that he wanted to start from an unexplained something, a mystery, a miracle—originated life, though how and why it had originated, what cause adequate to its production was lying behind, he did not know, and did not even presume to inquire. Indeed, he asked permission to posit not only the few forms whose being had just begun, but also the environment within which they lived. He thus smuggled in two of the largest conceptions which can be formed by the mind of man (that of the origin of life and of the environment necessary to its development), the very conceptions which have perplexed the race into belief in all the various cosmogonies. In so doing he concealed from himself (and doubtless from others also who were attracted by his scientific hypothesis) the distinction between a simplified cause and a simplified process." So wrote one whose objection was not to evolution but to any and every statement of the doctrine of evolution that ignored God's essential part in the process.

It will thus be seen that the theory of evolution as first advanced by Darwin was not a doctrine of creation, of the origin of life and other things, but it did have direct and fundamental bearing on the doctrine of providence, that is, on the ongoing of the world and the process of development in all its details. Darwin believed that the laws of nature, if fully understood, would account for and explain the development of all existing

forms of life, but many who received the theory of evolution from him went far beyond him in the claims made for the theory—and this was done in two opposite directions. Materialistic evolutionists claimed that this hypothesis explained the origin and development of all things out of eternally existing material atoms and made unnecessary the assumption of a personal God either as Creator or Preserver. Theistic evolutionists, on the other hand, found in this theory the most satisfactory explanation of the method according to which the one personal God had developed his created universe into what it now is.

In all departments of science—in astronomy, in geology, in biology, for example—the theory of evolution has come to be accepted as true by the great body of well accredited scientists. As to whether this theory is true or not, they can best tell us who have studied astronomy, geology, and biology most carefully and scientifically. In the meantime all devout theists will rest assured that if it turns out to be true—if it has been proved to be true, or shall in the future be proved to be true—it will simply mean that it is after this manner that the God of creation and providence has been working in the past and is still working. It is of interest and importance to us to know whether among the large number who accept the doctrine of evolution there is to be found a considerable number who believe that nature with all its laws is from God and under the government of an immanent, personal God. We do well to let witnesses speak for themselves and confess their faith. Every one who believes in God but does not himself believe in evolution should surely, it would seem, rejoice to find that any one who does believe in it is finding it a pathway to God. If men who believe in a personal God are, as indeed they are, coming to believe more and more in evolution, he will have an increasingly difficult and embarrassing task to perform who feels that it is his duty to prove that men who believe in evolution cannot consistently believe in God.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This seems to be the task that certain religious leaders of our day have appointed themselves to accomplish, and some of these "defenders of the faith" have indeed gone so far as to say that they who believe

*2. "Devolution" as Natural as Evolution*

In searching for examples and proofs of evolution in nature, and in their zeal to array these evidences of an upward development that has marked the past history of nature, inanimate and animate, scientists have not, it seems to us, duly recognised and emphasised the ever present natural tendency towards retrogression, the tendency in universal nature, whether material, animal, rational, or moral, to "backslide," unless some intelligent force, some force controlled by mind, is put forth to retain the higher level gained. In other words the reversible process of evolution—call it devolution, or reversion, or retrogression, or degeneration, or what we may—is just as pronounced and manifest a tendency of nature as evolution is, if indeed it be not even more manifest and potent. The improvements in our vegetables and fruits are not due to natural evolution but to the principle of evolution guided by mind—by such intelligence as that found, for example, in a John Burroughs. It takes a ceaseless force to keep the uphill movement of nature going, and the moment it anywhere ceases, the result is, not to remain stationary at the stopping-place, but instantly to start backward and down-hill. To ignore this "natural" tendency of everything "ascending" to stop and start downward is to obscure and fail to reveal the strongest evidence that evolution furnishes of its dependence upon an intelligent and moral force for continuous progress upward. In other words evolution is absolutely dependent upon some such potent intelligent and moral force as is implied in the theistic term God. In the due recognition of the fact to which we here call attention there should be entire agreement between science and religion, as a recent writer has shown in words which we quote:

"The platform upon which science and religion can meet must be one broad enough to hold the scientist's admission that the Bible's pronouncement upon the motive-springs of

in God and in evolution are a more harmful and pernicious influence in the realm of religion than they who are atheistic evolutionists!"

human nature has been established beyond question by laboratory-tests equal to his own. Moreover, it must have room for the church's approval of the 'method' of science. The scientist's method of observation, comparison, and verification by experiment accords with the genius of experiential religion. This method is itself the greatest treasure which science holds, for it is the key to the store-chambers of the universe. Upon such a platform of mutual concession, churchmen and scientists will find, together, 'unity in essentials; in unessentials, liberty; charity in all things. . . .' The mutual relations of evolution and religion, with this caution in mind, become plain. Religion is dynamic; evolution is descriptive. If the description evolution gives is correct, the theory is helpful to religion; if faulty, it works harm by ungirding the 'controls.' . . . Human progress ceased long since as an automatic mechanical process—if it ever was that. It is now linked to man's quest for God. As soon, therefore, as the quest for God ceases, man's 'progress' becomes chiefly a slide backward. . . .

"Whenever man breaks his conscious relationship to God, so that his only relationship, felt and acknowledged, is the earth-relationship and the heritage of flesh, he starts spinning down the long spiral of evolution up which mankind has so painfully struggled towards conscious sonship with God. Even in the midst of apparent prosperity, disintegration may overtake his social institutions, while the individual passes from the order of moral vertebrates downward toward the moral invertebrate. Then, unless brought back to self consciousness by the chastisements of God or the invincible attraction of the Christ-man, he passes into the valley of the shadow of death, until that time, when, purified as by fire, the soul is nerved once more for the upward journey towards the Father of Lights."<sup>1</sup>

### 3. *Moral Evolution*

There is something cruel and inhuman in materialistic evolution as expressed in the law of the survival of the fittest in the struggle for existence. It means that in the animal world selfishness reigns and the strong crush out and kill and devour the weak. Quite the opposite of this is the method of moral evolution as expounded and illustrated by Christ, who made it

<sup>1</sup> Marshall Dawson, "Nineteenth Century Evolution and After."

the law of his kingdom, indeed, that the morally fittest should survive, and not only survive but continually increase; but moral survival and increase means that the strong shall support the weak, the healthy shall serve the sick, the learned shall serve the ignorant, the holy shall serve and save the sinful, the higher shall serve the lower.

"Animals become strong by crushing the weak; man becomes strong by lifting the weak; the law of the woods is physical; the law of human life is spiritual. When man lives by the law of the jungle, he becomes a Rameses, or Nero, or Caligula. When man follows the law of the spirit, which is that of the human kingdom, he becomes a Moses, or St. John, or John Harvard, or William Wilberforce. When woman follows the law of the animal kingdom she becomes a Jezebel, or Cleopatra, or Herodias, or Catherine de Medici. When woman follows the law of her own womanly life, she becomes a Queen Victoria, or Florence Nightingale, or Frances Willard. Animals become beautiful by the expenditure of brute force in dealing out death to their species; man becomes beautiful by the expenditure of spiritual force in dealing out life to those who are weak."<sup>1</sup>

No one has recognised this difference between evolution and the survival of the strongest as exemplified in animal life and moral evolution as exemplified in the life of human beings better than did Huxley, himself an evolutionist, who wrote as follows:

"The practice of that which is ethically best—what we call goodness or virtue—involves a course of conduct which, in all respects, is opposed to that which leads to success in the cosmic struggle for existence. In place of ruthless self-assertion, it demands self-restraint; in the place of thrusting aside or treading down all competitors, it requires that the individual shall not merely respect but shall help his fellows. Its influence is directed not so much to the survival of the fittest as to the fitting of as many as possible to survive. Laws and morals are directed to the end of curbing the cosmic process

<sup>1</sup> J. W. Lee, "The Religion of Science," pp. 292-93.

and reminding the individual of his duty to the community, to the protection and influence of which he owes, if not existence itself, at the least the life of something better than a brutal savage."

## II

## THEISTIC EVOLUTION

It has long been noted by those familiar with the writings of materialistic and agnostic men of science that they cannot altogether get rid of God. They must needs spell Matter and Force with capital letters to express their faith in the greatness of this "inscrutable Mystery," this mysterious "Energy" that pervades Nature; and they in a sense worship this great "Unknown." But that is not theism. What Matthew Arnold's God is in the realm of human nature and ethics—a Power not ourselves that makes for righteousness—that the evolutionist's "God" is in the realm of physical nature—a power in matter which though not personal is not identical with matter, but is continually making for life and consciousness and mind. And would not the Apostle Paul speak to those who worship inscrutable impersonal power in nature as their "unknown God" words similar to those addressed to the men of Athens: "What, therefore, ye ignorantly worship as impersonal power, *that* declare I unto you is none other than the personal God that made the world and all things therein, even the Lord of heaven and earth, who dwelleth not in temples made with hands, but is he in whom we live and move and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring."

*I. Evolution as Interpreted by Theistic Scientists*

Over against the views of evolutionists who are materialists, atheists and agnostics, who find no place for a personal God in their theory of the universe of being, we place the views of those who believe profoundly in God and divine Providence, and also believe that it is by a process of evolution that God has made the world to be what it is to-day. We now give

some of the most eminent and well known of these theistic evolutionists an opportunity to state their own views.

A well known scientist who was a theistic Christian evolutionist, and who found in the study of geology a sure pathway to God was the late Dr. Alexander Winchell. A generation ago he was regarded by many as almost radical in his advanced and progressive views, but he would be regarded as quite conservative to-day. Among the utterances found in his writings, setting forth the views of a Christian evolutionist as to how the study of geology leads to faith in God, we quote the following as expressive of his mature convictions on this subject :

"The great work of terrestrial preparation always implied the coming of man. He is correlated to the whole history of organised life, and cannot be contemplated except as the final link in the chain of being which stretches back through geologic eons. That the whole course of physical preparation looked toward man as its consummation is evidenced by the fact that every great revolution of the terrestrial crust constituted a forward step in the fashioning and furnishing of an abode for intelligent beings. The useful metals, elaborated and eliminated through the ages of geological activity, are suited exclusively to human needs and ends. The vast deposits of mineral coal laid by thousands of ages before the creation of man sustain no relations to any other than human existence. Thus man is a consummation foreshadowed through countless ages of organic and inorganic preparations.

"Nature, reaching in man the completion of the work of organic development, marked the consummation of its creative progress by superadding to this most perfect organism an endowment of an intellectual and moral nature not vouchsafed to any other form of animal life. Thus man is presented to all intelligences as the final consummation of the long series of revolutions and advances whose records are written upon the pages of science.

"We cannot resist the conviction that, in a world where almost everything presents some unmistakable and even anticipatory adaptation to promote happiness, and where so many things have no discoverable end if it be not to promote happy-

ness, the attribute of benevolence must have actuated the Planner of existing arrangements. We regard the material world, therefore, as proof of the exercise of power, intelligence and beneficence. This conclusion is the result of a process of reason which we cannot evade or escape except by a total abandonment of grounds of inference which are ingrained in human nature and underlie all human thoughts and actions. The data of science, therefore, supplemented by the data of reason, establish the existence of such a Creator as is portrayed in our Scriptures.”<sup>1</sup>

One of the strongest exponents of modern theistic evolution, the late John Fiske, is the author of a volume titled “Through Nature to God,” to which we have already referred. It is a powerful argument in proof of the fact that if the premises upon which the doctrine of evolution is founded be true, then there not only may be but there must be a personal God to account for the always and everywhere prevalent belief that the human race has had in the existence of such a Being. One does not have to be a believer in all the implications of the doctrine of evolution to find both intellectual and religious satisfaction in reading this interesting little volume. In no way, perhaps, can the ideas and ideals of a theistic evolutionist be presented to better advantage than by quoting a few paragraphs from this volume. As a protagonist of the doctrine of evolution Fiske affirmed four important corollaries: “a theistic basis for all cosmic phenomena; ethical principles an outcome from man’s social experience; man’s immortality a rational hypothesis from cosmic phenomena; religion the rational adjustment of man to his environment.”<sup>2</sup> His faith in God and in evolution finds strong expression in the following words:

“The doctrine of evolution properly understood, does not leave the scales equally balanced between materialism and

<sup>1</sup> These free quotations from Dr. Winchell’s volume titled “The Reconciliation of Science and Religion” involve abbreviations and occasional slight changes in phraseology, rendered necessary by the abbreviations made.

<sup>2</sup> “Life and Letters of John Fiske,” by J. S. Clark.

theism, but irredeemably discredits the former, while it places the latter upon a firmer foundation than it has ever before occupied. . . . The 'Principles of Psychology,' published in 1855 by Herbert Spencer, was the first application of the theory of evolution on a grand scale. Taken in connection with the discoveries of natural selection, of spectrum analysis, and of the mechanical equivalence between molar and molecular motions, it led the way to that sublime conception of the unity of nature by which the minds of scientific thinkers are now coming to be dominated. When we have once thoroughly grasped the monotheistic conception of the universe as an organic whole, animated by the omnipresent spirit of God, we have forever taken leave of that materialism to which the universe was merely an endless multitude of phenomena. Could we penetrate the hidden depths where, according to Dante, the story of Nature is bound with divine love in a mystic volume, we should find therein no traces of hazard or incongruity. From man's origin we gather hints of his destiny, and the study of evolution leads our thoughts through Nature to God. . . . The advance of modern science carries us irresistibly to what some German philosophers call monism, but I prefer to call it monotheism.

"The impetus of modern scientific thought tends with overwhelming force toward the conception of a single First Cause, or Prime Mover, perpetually manifested from moment to moment in all the protean changes that make up the universe. This is practically identical with the Athanasian conception of the immanent Deity. . . . The general effect of this intellectual movement which we have described has been to discredit more than ever before the Latin idea of God as a power outside of the course of nature and occasionally interfering with it. In all directions the process of evolution has been discovered, working after similar methods, and this has forced upon us the belief in the unity of nature. We are thus driven to the Greek conception of God as the immanent power working in and through nature without interference or infraction of law. . . . If on the one hand it is impossible for the finite mind to fathom the Infinite, on the other hand it is practically misleading to apply the term 'Unknowable' to the Deity that is revealed in every pulsation of the wondrously rich and beautiful life of the universe. For most persons no amount of explanation will prevent the use of the word 'Unknowable'

from seeming to remove Deity to an unapproachable distance, whereas the Deity revealed in the process of evolution is the ever-present God without whom not a sparrow falls to the ground and whose voice is heard in each whisper of conscience, even while his splendour dwells in the white ray from yonder star that began its earthward flight while Abraham's shepherds watched their flocks."

Referring to those who have more recently challenged the indisputable facts of science regarding evolution and have attempted to impose unwarrantable restrictions upon the liberty of research and utterance of teachers of science in institutions of higher learning, President Hibben of Princeton University, in his annual baccalaureate address, expressed his own faith in the following words :

"I for one resent as an unwarranted presupposition the claims of those who take the position that if one believes in the facts of evolution he can no longer consistently adhere to belief in the Christian religion. It is a singular thing that there should be in present-day controversies the fear of recognising the facts of evolution when applied to the development in time of our physical frame, when it is so clearly evident that the moral and spiritual consciousness of the race has progressed by painfully slow stages. The history of the long years of religious experience contained in the Old Testament is a history of an evolution of the early crude ideas of God, ever taking on more and more of a spiritual nature, from the original idea of a tribal God to that of the God of all races of mankind, until there appears the final consummation in the life and teachings and personality of Jesus Christ, in whom the divine element in man came to its complete development and fully dominated his nature and his life. No one can deny that whatever may be the reason, which we cannot understand, God's ways of manifesting himself have always been through the slow processes of nature.

"It is no concern of ours whether the dust from which we have risen be animate or inanimate—the point is that we have risen. We can never be confused with the dust under our feet, or the animal which follows at our heels, or mocks at us from his cage. It is to me a matter of indifference how slowly the processes of nature may seem to advance from stage to

stage of an ever progressive development. Judged as we finite beings must judge of time, the processes seem indeed incredibly slow, but let us not forget that behind the majestic panorama of the evolution of life upon our globe is the Eternal One in whose sight a thousand years are but as yesterday when it is passed and as a watch in the night."

The man of science who believes in God, who finds that faith in evolution is a pathway to God, is an ally and not an enemy of the Christian religion. This is no time to treat allies as enemies because they fail to utter our Shibboleth in passing over Jordan. "To-day more than ever in the history of mankind," says President Hibben, "we need the concerted effort of all allied forces of light in the struggle with the powers of darkness."

Dr. R. A. Millikan, of the California Institute of Technology, one of the most eminent of American men of science, from whom we have already quoted, says:

"There have been just two great influences in the history of the world which have made goodness the outstanding characteristic in the conception of God. The first influence was Jesus of Nazareth; the second influence has been the growth of modern science and particularly the growth of the theory of evolution. . . . What is the meaning of existence? Is it worth while? Are we going anywhere? Jesus and modern science have both answered that question in the affirmative—Jesus took it as his mission in life to preach the need of the goodness of God. He came in an age which was profoundly ignorant of modern science. He used the terms in dealing with disease and evil which were appropriate to his day, the only terms which his audiences could have understood; but he saw a God who was caring for every sparrow and who was working out through love a world planned for the happiness and well-being of all creatures.

"Similarly science in the formulation of the theory of evolution has the world developing through countless ages higher and higher qualities, moving on to better and better things. It pictures God, however you may conceive him, as essentially good, as providing a reason for existence and a motive for making the most of existence, in that we may be

a part of the great plan of world progress. No more sublime conception of God has ever been presented to the mind of man than that which is furnished by science when it represents him as revealing himself through countless ages in the development of the earth as an abode for man and in the age-long inbreathing of life into its constituent matter, culminating in man with his spiritual nature and all his god-like powers.”<sup>1</sup>

Dr. William W. Keen, emeritus Professor of Surgery in Jefferson Medical College, Philadelphia, has recently published a volume entitled “I Believe in God and Evolution.” It is exceptional to read anything from an English Scientist or man of letters or theologian referring to matters of science that fails to reveal either outspoken acceptance of the scientific doctrine of evolution or an attitude of open hospitality towards it as a scientific hypothesis.

Now it does not follow from these many “confessions of faith” on the part of modern scientists that the doctrine of evolution is therefore true; but these statements do prove, if “testimonies” can prove anything, that men of the highest standing in the literary, ethical and scientific world can and do believe both in a personal God as revealed in the Scriptures and in the doctrine of evolution as expounded by modern scientists. What, then, let us ask, should be the Christian believer’s attitude towards this and all other scientific questions that involve an interpretation of physical nature?

<sup>1</sup> Among living scientists whose public utterances and published writings prove them to be outspoken believers in God and also in the scientific doctrine of evolution Professor Millikan enumerates the following: Charles D. Walcott, who, as head of the Smithsonian Institution at Washington, President of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and President of the National Academy of Sciences, occupies the most conspicuous and influential scientific position in America to-day; Henry Fairfield Osborn, Director of the American Museum of Natural History in New York City; Edwin Grant Conklin, Professor of Biology in Princeton University; John C. Merriam, President of the Carnegie Institution of Washington and America’s foremost paleontologist; Professor Michael I. Pupin, of Columbia University, foremost of the scientific electrical experts of America; Professor John M. Coulter of the University of Chicago, most noted of American botanists; Professors A. A. and W. A. Noyes, foremost among American chemists; James R. Angell, distinguished psychologist and President of Yale University; James H. Breasted of Chicago University, most distinguished of American archæologists; Thomas C. Chamberlain, Dean of American geologists; C. G. Abbott, Secretary of the National Academy of Sciences and eminent astronomer.

*2. The Proper Attitude of Christian Believers Towards Evolution*

"Fifty years ago," says Canon Barnes of Westminster, "the belief prevailed that because of some obscure flaw in the construction and government of the universe religion and science were hopelessly at enmity with each other, and it was therefore the religious thing to do to rail at science and scientists. Divines looked upon men of science if not with positive hostility, at least with wary suspicion; and many of the church leaders and champions of orthodoxy acted as though undue familiarity with scientists might tarnish the pure lustre of their orthodoxy and bring them under suspicion of sympathy with evolution. Men of science, on the other hand, conscious that they were giving their lives to the pursuit of truth, resented such treatments. However serious the differences between Roman Catholics and Protestants in many points of faith and practice, they were united in their common opposition to Darwinism and evolution. Some twenty years after Darwin's 'Origin of Species' was published it had created such widespread interest and was commanding such a hospitable hearing at the hands not only of the scientific but the entire scholarly world that the Pope of Rome took alarm, and publicly denounced evolution as a system which is at once repugnant to history, to the traditions of all peoples, to exact science, to observed facts, and even to Reason herself—a system that degrades man himself to the level of the unreasoning brutes. And his words were matched by many others that were uttered by Protestant bishops, preachers and professors without number. In the face of the severest and most persistent criticism and opposition from the Church that any scientific doctrine ever had, evolution has grown in the faith of men of science until it now as a theory practically dominates the scientific world."

The fact that creation is found to have been progressive, that unsuspected links unite its consecutive stages, that the tendency of science is to unveil a certain continuity in nature, leads the shortsighted, says Dr. G. P. Fisher, to ignore the

supernatural altogether. They imagine that there is no need to call in God to explain nature except where breaks are met in the chain of mechanical causation. If it be true that the plants in their multiplied species or kinds spring out of a few primitive germs, or out of only one, the evidence of fore-thought and will-power in the organisation of the vegetable kingdom is not in the least weakened. Nor would it be effaced if the spontaneous generation of the living from the lifeless were an ascertained fact of science.

No theory of evolution clashes with the fundamental ideas of the Bible as long as it is not denied that there *is* a human species, and that man is distinguished from the lower animals by attributes which we know that he possesses. Whether the first of human kind were created outright, or, as the second narrative in Genesis represents it, were formed out of inorganic material, out of the dust of the ground, or were generated by inferior organised beings, through a metamorphosis of germs, or some other process—these questions, as they are indifferent to theism, so they are indifferent as regards the substance of Biblical teaching. It is only when, in the name of science, the attempt is made to smuggle in a materialistic philosophy that the essential ideas of the Bible are contradicted. As regards the idea of creation, or the origin of things by the act of God's will, it is a point on which science is incompetent to pronounce. It belongs in the realm of philosophy and theology. Natural science can describe the forms of being that exist, can trace them back to antecedent forms, can continue the process until it arrives at a point beyond which investigation can go no farther; then it must hand over the problem to philosophy. To disprove creation would require an insight into the nature of matter and of finite spirit such as no discreet man of science would pretend for a moment to have gained.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It was more than a quarter of a century ago that Dr. G. P. Fisher of Yale University gave utterance to the thoughts presented in the last two paragraphs, and it is not easy to express to-day in more satisfactory language the true Christian attitude towards evolution. See "Grounds of Theistic and Christian Belief," pp. 344-56. This book has long been in the course of study selected by the Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal

That there is no conflict between Christian faith and the teachings of modern Science is the deep conviction of Dr. W. N. Rice, the eminent scientist of Wesleyan University. He declares that in the monotheism of Hebrew bards, God was always conceived of as immanent in nature. But the faith in the divine immanance which had glorified nature for the Jew was abandoned by popular theology, and nature became godless because in the popular religious faith, God was seen only in the irregular, the abnormal and the extraordinary. With this notion, that the ordinary course of nature is independent of divine activity, and that God is to be seen only in breaches of natural law, only in the seeming gaps in the continuity of nature, the conflict of science and religion became inevitable. For the whole tendency of science is to fill the supposed gaps in the continuity of nature, which was, for the popular mind, to exclude God from the universe altogether. One by one, science annexed to the realm of law and order the districts in which lawless Personal Will had been supposed to reign. This left no place in the popular theology for the Divine Artisan. Men, however, who no longer saw God in the regular sunrise and sunset, still saw Him in that which was rare and irregular. They crouched in superstitious terror at the manifestation of divine anger in the eclipse, until science showed that the eclipse was only a less frequent manifestation of the same system of law which is shown in sunrise and sunset. Then the darkness of the eclipse became as godless as the darkness of night. Banished from astronomy, God seemed to find an asylum in the realm of meteorology, for the changes of weather seem at first sight sufficiently capricious for the most grossly anthropomorphic deity. But, when the coming storm came to be predicted while as yet not even "a little cloud like a man's hand" could be seen, the God of tempest became as superfluous as a God of sun or moon—God was needed only to account for things unnatural and extraordinary.

Church and of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, for the young ministers of these two churches. It may be supposed, therefore, to represent a view of evolution or a mental and religious attitude towards this scientific doctrine which the Bishops of these churches approve as altogether sane and safe.

The tendency of science to close up the seeming gaps in the continuity of nature has found its supreme manifestation in the development of the doctrine of evolution. The nebular theory showed that there was no breach of continuity in the origin of planets; the evolutionary geology showed that there was no breach of continuity in the development of the earth's physical features; and the evolutionary biology showed that there was no breach of continuity in the origin of new species, and suggested, on the ground of analogy, the probability that there was no breach of continuity in the origin of life itself. It was, indeed, in this stopping of the gaps in which alone the popular theology found the manifestation of God that science caused the agony of terror with which the theory of organic evolution was regarded for two decades or more after the publication of "The Origin of the Species." The obvious goal to which the analogies of scientific thought are leading us, is the belief that the series of evolutionary changes which we see stretching backward into the remote past and forward into the indefinite future, has neither beginning nor end; that creative Power and creative Intelligence have been eternally immanent in an eternal universe. I cannot help thinking that Christian Theology will be the gainer by the acceptance of such a view.<sup>1</sup>

There is every reason to believe that John Wesley would have been an open-minded student of the modern doctrine of evolution if it had been presented in his day as a method according to which God has created the world and developed it, through its inorganic and organic forms, into what it now is. It has been claimed that John Wesley was an evolutionist before Darwin. The following statements made by him in his article titled "A General View of the Gradual Progression of Beings," are quoted in justification of this claim. After speaking of "the ostrich with the feet of a goat which unites birds to quadrupeds," he says: "By what degrees does Nature raise herself to man? . . . How will she rectify this head that is always inclined toward earth? How change these paws

<sup>1</sup> See "Christian Faith in an Age of Science," pp. 314-318, from which the statements in these two paragraphs are culled and presented here in condensed form.

into flexible arms? What method will she make use of to transform these crooked feet into skilful and supple hands? Or will she widen and extend this contracted stomach? In what manner will she place the breasts and give them a roundness suitable to them? The ape is this rough draft of man, this rude sketch, an imperfect representation which nevertheless bears a resemblance to him, and is the last creature that serves to display the admirable progression of the works of God. . . . But mankind have their graduations as well as other productions of our globe. *There is a prodigious number of continued links between the most perfect man and the ape.*"

The time is long since past when faith in a personal God as Creator and Governor of all things must be regarded as incompatible with faith in evolution as the method and process by which things have come to be what they now are. The truth of evolution as a scientific theory for explaining the existing order of things cannot be settled by dogmatic theology or by an appeal to the Book of Genesis. This modern theory may be called in question and denied by one who believes that the world, with all its existing forms of life, was created in six literal days. But faith in evolution can no longer be regarded as atheism, seeing that the theistic evolutionist believes that evolution rather than instantaneous creation is the method according to which God has worked in the past and is still working. Many of the strongest and most devout of present day Christian theists found in all the churches not only believe in evolution but believe that the theory of evolution adds greatly to the strength of the arguments drawn from the created universe to prove the existence of a personal God and the power and wisdom of Him who preserves and governs all created things.

Strauss, the famous German critic, once referred to Darwin as "the man who drove the miraculous out of the universe." "But did he?" retorted an English Archbishop. "Did he drive out anything but a shallow interpretation of the miraculous? When Jesus said, 'My Father worketh hitherto and I work,' did he not assert the miracle of continuous creation?" "Where

Science begins, faith ends," said one who thought he found in the scientific study of nature a path that leads not to but away from God. But he represents, as we have already shown, a type of scientist who is growing less numerous every day, and less confident in his no-faith. On the contrary, "in the light of science we now see," says Dr. Gwatkin, "that the world is not a machine made once for all by some great engineer's hand from outside, but an organism slowly developed by a power working from within." While nature, said Charles Kingsley, "looks to many like a series of accidents, it is really, if the doctrine of evolution be true and be rightly interpreted, a series of special providences of Him without whom not a sparrow falls to the ground, and whose greatness, wisdom and perpetual care I never understood as I have since I became a convert to the theory of evolution."

From Dr. S. Parkes Cadman's luminous discussion of the modern attitude towards preachers and preaching, found in his volume titled "Ambassadors of God," I quote (in somewhat condensed form) words which I think well describe what may be regarded as the present attitude of the modern Christian scholarly world towards the scientific doctrine of evolution :

"As a theory of causation, evolution is meaningless; as a theory of methods, it is harmless; as a working hypothesis, it has been excelled, if at all, only by that of gravitation. He is the sagacious minister of the Gospel who leaves science to the scientists, while he prepares himself as best he can for the propagation of sacred truths which science can never successfully controvert. Thinking men and women everywhere have learned the unforgettable lessons that what is truly religious is finally reasonable and that scientific gains must be subordinated to moral aims, lest we all perish. Of all the theories science has put forth, that of evolution is the most capable of being reconciled with Revelation. The Christian Faith is bound to take unto itself the verified wonders of creation, which are resonant with the goodness and wisdom of Deity. Whatever makes life more rational, and therefore more truly divine, should be a part of the praise which the Church offers

to her Lord. Why then was not the idea of progressive development 'baptised into Christ'? The assertion that the several endowments of sentient existence, originally breathed into one or more primordial substances, were ceaselessly urged onward toward higher existence had nothing in it essentially opposed to Christian truth. Renewal, growth, fertility, contingent perfectibility—what are these but spiritual terms imported into the natural world?—terms with which the New Testament abounds at every turn. Here, as it impresses me, is a unique opening for the attachment of the hypothesis of progressive development to the highest interests of the race."

There are many "ambassadors of God" who feel as Dr. Cadman does concerning evolution as it is related to Christian faith. And there is special reason why on this subject we should let ministers of the Gospel as well as scientists declare in their own words what they think and feel. The following makes a fitting close to these quotations:

"Since the day that Jesus Christ came to tell us of the love and forgiveness of God and to seal his revelation with his life and death," says Dr. Carl S. Patton, "I do not know of any expansion that has come to our idea of God, equal to that brought by evolution. For when you get God inside his world, that means that God's forms of revelation are many; and that in addition to the Bible no art, no science, no religion, no anything that has blessed and helped mankind, has ever come, except from and by the inspiration of this indwelling spirit of the infinite God, who lives and moves in all things. Nature is the garment of God, law is the voice of God, conscience is the word of God, man is the living temple of God. Do what we will, be what we will, we can never escape from the presence of God. He is with us and in us. We have our daily being in him. The supreme contribution of evolution to human thought is not the solution it offers of a few riddles of the physical world, and the light it throws on some dark spots in the history of the earth and man, but the way it makes us feel at home with God and makes him real to us, and floods both the whole long past of the race and the depths of our own spirits with his presence."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Religion in the Thought of Today," pp. 39, 40.

No poem of recent origin, bearing incidentally on the doctrine of evolution, has attracted more attention than that by W. H. Carruth, titled "Each in His Own Tongue." It is as follows:

A fire-mist and a planet,  
A crystal and a cell,  
A jelly fish and a saurian,  
And caves where cavemen dwell;  
Then a sense of law and beauty,  
And a face turned from the clod,—  
Some call it Evolution,  
And others call it God.

A haze on the far horizon,  
The infinite tender sky,  
The rich ripe tint of the corn-fields,  
And the wild geese sailing high,—  
And all over the upland and lowland  
The charm of the golden rod,—  
Some of us call it Autumn,  
And others call it God.

Like tides on the crescent sea beach,  
When the moon is new and thin,  
Into our hearts high yearnings  
Come welling and surging in,—  
Come from the mystic ocean  
Whose rim no foot has trod,—  
Some of us call it Longing,  
And others call it God.

A picket frozen on duty,  
A mother starved for her brood,  
Socrates drinking the hemlock,  
And Jesus on the rood;  
And millions who, humble and nameless,  
The straight, hard pathway plod,—  
Some call it Consecration,  
And others call it God.

CHAPTER SEVEN  
THROUGH MAN TO GOD



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THROUGH MAN TO GOD

We have been travelling through nature up to nature's God. It is not, however, in the physical universe that we find the surest path that leads to God. This surer and better path is found in the intellectual and moral world of personality. It is in man's knowledge of himself and other human beings that his knowledge of God has its deepest roots and reaches its most assuring heights. The personality of man and the personality of God stand or fall together, and are both fundamental articles in the faith of theism. Pantheism and materialism deny the personality of God, but they likewise deny real and true personality to man. Having reasoned from nature up to nature's God, we come now to higher ground and reason from human nature up to human nature's God.

"It is characteristic of Christianity in particular," says Professor Ellwood, "that it throws its emphasis upon the human in religion rather than upon the non-human. It finds its revelation of the divine in the highest human. It finds, in other words, God in man, without denying, however, that God is in nature also."

"In order to know the way which leads to God and to take it with certainty, we have no need of foreign aid but of ourselves alone. As God is above all, the way which leads to him is neither distant, nor outside of us, nor difficult to find. The Kingdom of God is within us . . . If any one asks of me, What is the way? I answer that it is in the soul of each and the intelligence which it encloses." Thus wrote Athanasius, the maker and champion of "orthodoxy" in the fourth century of the Christian era.

## I

## MAN'S KINSHIP TO GOD

The Truth in God's breast  
Lies trace upon trace on ours impressed:  
Though he is so bright, and we so dim,  
We are made in his image to witness him.

In these words Robert Browning has stated not only the fact of our kinship to God but the purpose of it—that we may “witness him” who has done for us what he has done for no other earthly creature in that he made us to bear his own image. Our present task, then, is to find out in what respect man's nature and attributes are a revelation of his Creator.

*I. The Divine in Man and the Human in God*

In Genesis we read: “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. . . . And God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him. . . . In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him.” These words invite us to study not only the divine in man but the human in God. If God made man in his image, there must be something that is divine in man. If human beings bear the image of God, there must be something that is human in God. There are elements and attributes in the nature of God that are so essentially divine that they cannot be conceived of as belonging to man; and there are elements and attributes in the nature of man so essentially human and finite that they cannot be conceived of as belonging to God. But there are other elements and attributes that are common to both God and man—the difference, as they are found respectively in God and man, being one of degree and not of kind. The divine Self-Existence, Fatherhood, Sovereignty, Eternity, Omnipresence—these are properties of the infinite Creator which cannot be imparted to, or possessed by, man, the finite creature. For man to possess these elements and attributes in his nature would mean that he had ceased to be finite and human. On the other hand, a material

body, physical appetites, human frailties and limitations, dependence, and the like are elements and attributes of humanity that cannot be possessed by the Infinite God. But God and man are alike possessed of natures and attributes that are defined as spiritual, moral, rational. Both are alike possessed of mind or intellect which thinks and knows; of heart or emotion which feels and loves; of will or volition which chooses and determines; of moral consciousness or conscience that apprehends and guides in matters of right and wrong. These are the attributes which are shared in common by God and man, and which serve to define that nature in the image of which man was created. These serve to point out the path along which we must travel if we approach "through man to God."

Dr. George A. Gordon, of Boston, some time since published a notable volume titled "Through Man to God," which emphasises the superiority of this line of approach over that of physical nature. "There are," he says, "but two ways of approach to the character of the infinite: cosmic nature and man. It is true that these exist together in a kind of sacramental union. It may seem that in any attempt to regard them as opposites there is a violation of the great law, what God hath joined together let no man put asunder. Still they stand to each other as higher and lower, and they speak a different word concerning the mystery that is within them and behind them. Some years ago John Fiske published an interesting book under the title 'Through Nature to God.' Many men whom I honour found light in that book. When I read it, I felt that my convictions were fundamentally opposed not so much to the isolated ideas of the book as to the plan expressed in its title. The title of my book originated in this fundamental opposition to Mr. Fiske's plan. 'Through Man to God' is the expression that sums up my conception of the heart and soul of Christianity." We are not ourselves "fundamentally opposed," as is Dr. Gordon, to either the title or the argument of John Fiske's book, "Through Nature to God"; nevertheless, we are at one with Dr. Gordon in thinking that, while travelling "Through Man to God," we are journeying

along a safer, surer, higher and more luminous pathway than when we are travelling "Through Nature to God." As a matter of fact, however, "Through Nature to God," as John Fiske uses that term, includes "Through Man to God."

Dr. Lynn Harold Hough has expressed in a unique and original manner the fact of God's creation of man in his own divine image. We quote his words:—

"We meet the adventurous God first when we think of creation; and the more we think of it the more astonishing creation is. The wonderful thing about creation is the making of people. There is nothing especially exciting about making a tree. The tree can never defy you. There is nothing especially dramatic about making a stone. The stone is helpless in your hands. But the minute you make a person you have made a possible foe. A person can love back; he can also hate back. And when you have a world full of persons you are in danger of a world-wide mutiny. The method of creation does not change all this. You can have all the millenniums you need for the most dignified unfolding of implicit potencies. The fact remains that when personality emerges and self-conscious will has come to be, the curtain is ready to rise upon a scene packed with thrills. The God who took all the risks of creation was the most amazing adventurer of whom we can conceive.

"A sculptor is in a sense an adventurer; he puts his very soul into the marble. But a father is more of an adventurer, for he is responsible for the existence of a being who may break his heart. The great Father God ran the risk of infinite heart-break for the sake of the hope of infinite loving companionship. He took risks which are so vast and so far-reaching that they are simply beyond the range of our thought. Now the moment you begin to think of the God of creation in this fashion he begins to come within the range of our sympathetic understanding. In our own small way we have had experiences which are parallel to this. We can find a platform upon which to stand in order to speak to such a God. And it is a mistake to call this sort of thinking anthropomorphic. That is getting the actual situation upside down. The things we have been saying have their real con-

nection with that flash of biblical insight in which it is said that God created man in his own image.”<sup>1</sup>

## 2. *Anthropomorphism*

Anthropomorphism is a theological term which signifies the representation of God as if he were a man; and more particularly as if he were possessed of a human body with its physical properties and limitations. By unduly emphasising these latter qualities in thinking and speaking of the Divine Being, anthropomorphic representations and conceptions of God may become low and debasing. But if kept within due limits this method of referring to God is proper and right in that it is impossible for us to conceive of God as a person without attributing to him the essential qualities of personality as we find them exhibited in men. If God is to be understood by us when he speaks, he must speak to us in the language of earth. The entire Bible, says Dr. W. B. Pope, is pervaded by what is called anthropomorphism and anthropopathy. The former term gives a name to the condescension of God in seeming to take a human form and human attributes, being the style adopted by the Almighty when he speaks and acts as a man. The latter term includes also the peculiar affections of man, not excepting some that belong to his infirmity, such as hope and suspense. Not that the reality does not correspond. The Supreme gives us indeed a true representation of himself; but it is a revelation that is adapted especially to our world, that it may be understood by us men. God reveals himself and his will to man as one made in his own image and permits him to infer the perfection in his Maker of what in himself is imperfect. God speaks to man as the finite copy of his infinite Self. Personality, power, goodness, truth, love, are reflections in us of his image; realities in us corresponding to realities in him. “He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see?” This is the poetry of anthropomorphism; but it teaches the profound truth that we are transcripts from an eternal Archetype, after which we are refashioned by being con-

<sup>1</sup> “The Productive Beliefs,” pp. 29, 30.

formed to the "Image of the invisible God," the Son of God incarnate, "the Firstborn of every creature."<sup>1</sup>

Not nature, then, but human nature is God's best revealer. Can the house which you have built and which you live in, be it ever so richly and artistically furnished, tell your guest the whole of your character? No; there is in that house at best only a hint of your soul—the highest and best that is in you remains unrevealed. But your own child, that shares your nature and bears your image, who has lived and communed with you and not only knows your mind and heart but reproduces them in his own thoughts and loves, whose will and conscience reflect your own ethical ideals and character—he can truly and fully reveal you. This material universe is God's house, and there are indeed many beautiful and wonderful things in it that tell us that its Maker and Builder is God. But "the mind and heart and soul of our Eternal Host, the inmost character of the Infinite, can be revealed to man only by and through man. Only the men who live in the thought of God, who behold with unclouded vision his moral integrity, who dwell in the consciousness of his loving-kindness, who rise up into strength under the inspiration of his Spirit—only they can reveal the intellect, the conscience, the heart, the deep soul, the eternal humanity, of our God." The human soul alone can reveal to us the human God; and where man fails in love, God fails in a vehicle for the perfect revelation of himself. It is through the mind of man that we learn that God has a mind and what the mind of God is; it is through the heart of man that we learn that God has a heart; through the will of man that God has a will; through the conscience of man that God has a moral nature. It is because there is divinity in man and humanity in God that both could meet in perfect unison in Jesus Christ, the God-man. It is because Jesus was so genuinely and perfectly human, not less than because he was truly divine, that he has been the most perfect revealer of God to Man.

Although "Through Man to God" is an entirely proper, and

<sup>1</sup> See Pope's "Compendium of Christian Theology," from which this definition of Anthropomorphism is largely taken.

even necessary, approach to a human interpretation of the Divine Being, there are dangers of misinterpretations growing out of the analogy no less than helpful suggestions found in it. It is well therefore that we heed the warning found in the following words of Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick:—

“Few passages in Scripture better deserve a preacher’s attention than God’s accusation against his people in the 50th Psalm: ‘Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself.’ The universal applicability of this charge is evident to any one who knows the history of man’s religious thought. If in the beginning God did make man in his own image, man has been busy ever since making God in his image, and the deplorable consequences are everywhere to be seen. From idolaters, who bow down before wooden images of the divine in human form, to ourselves, praying to a magnified man throned somewhere in the skies, man has persistently run God into his own mould. To be sure, this tendency of man to think of God as altogether such a one as ourselves is nothing to be surprised at.

“The idea that God must be approached by stated ceremonies came directly from thinking of God in terms of a human monarch. No common man could walk carelessly into the presence of an old-time king. There were proprieties to be observed. There were courtiers who knew the proper approach to royalty, through whom the common folk would better send petitions up and from whom they would better look for favour. So God was pictured as a human monarch with his throne, his sceptre, his ministering attendants. Here on earth the priests were those courtiers who knew the effectual way of reaching him, by whom we would best send up our prayers, through whom we would best look for our salvation. Max Nordau is not exaggerating when he says: ‘When we have studied the sacrificial rites, the incantations, prayers, hymns, and ceremonies of religion, we have as complete a picture of the relations between our ancestors and their chiefs as if we had seen them with our own eyes.’

“Our anthropomorphism, however, reaches its most dangerous form in our inward imaginations of God’s character. How the pot has called the kettle black! Man has read his vanities into God, until he has supposed that singing anthems

to God's praise might flatter him as it would flatter us. Man has read his cruelties into God, and what in moments of vindictiveness and wrath we would like to do to our enemies, we have supposed the Eternal God would do to his. Man has read his religious partisanship into God; he who holds Orion and the Pleiades in his leash, the Almighty and Everlasting God, before whom in the beginning the morning stars sang together, has been conceived as though he were a Baptist or a Methodist, a Presbyterian or an Anglican. Man has read his racial pride into God; nations have thought themselves his chosen people above all his other children because they seemed so to themselves. The centuries are sick with a god made in man's image, and all the time the real God has been saying, "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself."<sup>1</sup>

## II

## THROUGH PSYCHOLOGY TO GOD

The fact that man bears the image of God, and that this image is found not in his visible, physical body, but in his inner spiritual nature, makes it fitting that we turn to psychology and travel through human psychology to God. We have gone far enough to find that if we can reason "through nature to God," and find in the physical universe the material for an argument to prove the existence of an infinite spiritual Being, much more safely and soundly can we reason "through human nature to God." If nature proves something about God, human nature proves a great deal more about him. So far in this chapter we have treated man in a general way as a person, a self-conscious spiritual being, bearing the image of his Creator; we have studied him objectively, so to speak. We propose now to study him subjectively, and to this end analyse his spiritual nature. Psychology is a subjective study of man—the study of man as he is within himself—and this will furnish us with an approach to God at once easy and altogether trustworthy.

<sup>1</sup> "Christianity and Progress," pp. 219-221.

*i. Human Consciousness*

The contents or materials of psychology are derived through self-consciousness from the mind thinking about itself, thinking about its own thoughts and feelings and volitions, and from studying mind, emotion and will as one sees them in exercise and manifested in others. Consciousness is the basis of all our knowledge about ourselves and is the inner "clearing house" of all our knowledge about other things both physical and spiritual. "I think, therefore I am," says the philosopher. But I may just as truly say, "I love, therefore I am," and I may be so much in love as to be more conscious of loving than of thinking. I may also no less truly say, "I will, therefore I am," and in the act of putting forth a volition, my consciousness is, if anything, more intensely active than in thinking or loving. But not only do I come to know myself in and through consciousness; but through it I come to know and distinguish the "not-self" as well as the "self,"—the physical as something distinct from the spiritual.

The citadel of theism, says Dr. George P. Fisher, is in the consciousness of our own personality. Within ourselves God reveals himself more directly than through any other channel. Out of man's perception of his own personal attributes arises the belief in a personal God. Nature cannot give that which she does not herself possess. Only a personal Power above nature can account for self-consciousness in man. The spark of divine fire is deposited in nature; it is in nature, but not of it. But the consciousness of God enters inseparably into the consciousness of self as its hidden background. The descent subjectively into our inmost being is at the same time an ascent objectively to God. All profound reflection in which the soul contemplates its own being brings us to God, in whom we live and move and have our being.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See "Grounds of Theistic and Christian Belief."

*2. Body and Spirit*

The first result of an appeal to self-consciousness is the recognition of man's twofold nature. I am conscious of a material body and an immaterial soul or spirit. But there is a difference. My body is mine, but it is not I; it is not identical with me. I make a distinction between myself and my body. Yet I am one thing, not two things. In the unity of my spiritual being is a thinking mind, a feeling heart, and a willing will, but my body with its head and hands and feet, its bones and blood and flesh, is quite another thing. I do not make any distinction between myself and my spirit. My spirit is not only mine, but it is I; it is me. The true ego is the spirit, not the body. The body exists for the spirit, not the spirit for the body. From consciousness we learn that, while matter may condition mind, it does not cause mind; but mind and spirit, on the contrary, act upon matter not only in a conditioning way but in a causative and controlling way. Spirit and mind, therefore, represent the dominant and greater reality. If, now, my consciousness reveals the reality and the dominance of the spiritual in the finite world in which I move and have my being, then why should not the same be true of the infinite world of which my finite world is only a part? Reasoning by analogy, then, psychology furnishes an irresistible argument in favour of the reality and dominance in the universe of an infinite Spirit.

But psychology not only reveals the existence of spirit as distinct from matter; it goes farther as already indicated, and reveals spirit as composed of intellect, emotion, and will, each and all of which phases and functions of the finite spirit will furnish parallel pathways to a knowledge of God, the infinite Spirit, who, being personal like ourselves, must be possessed of mind and heart and will just as we are.

*3. Through the Intellect to God*

Uppermost among the attributes that distinguish and separate man from all other forms of creaturely existence on our planet is the fact that he is a rational being and thinks. And

yet, although he alone thinks, reflects and reasons, he is in the midst of a rational world. He is surrounded by that which is intelligible, by things everywhere which require mind to interpret, and which, being interpreted by mind, become the material for that constructive work of the mind which we call reasoning. Reason is that faculty of the spiritual man that relates things to each other and combines them so as to build something intellectually larger and greater. It puts premises together and draws conclusions therefrom larger and greater than any one of the premises. A conclusion is the truth contained in two or more premises reduced to intellectual unity; and it becomes in turn a premise for combination with other premises looking and leading to a yet larger and greater conclusion. Thus reasoning represents that function or exercise of the mind without which there can be no intellectual advance or progress in knowledge. From mind in man, the creature, we reason up to mind in God, the Creator; from evidences of mind in the thing made we infer mind in the maker, whether the maker be man or God.

Some one has said that "man cannot think without thinking God," that God's existence is involved in the very process of thought. Man's very thoughts are in a sense beliefs concerning Deity, says Dr. Fairbairn, and his relations to the Deity and the Deity's to him are such "that he can as little choose to be religious as to be rational; he is both, and both by the same necessity of nature." The human mind, by an irresistible necessity of its own being, seeks for causes for everything, and demands adequate causes for things. The origin of mind or spirit in the world demands a satisfactory cause to explain it. Matter cannot cause or explain mind. Spirit can come only from Spirit. There is no possible resting place for the human intellect until a Being endowed with attributes sufficient to account for all things, and especially all things intellectual and spiritual, is assumed to exist. Man finds everything in the universe, from the tiniest atom to the limitless solar systems in infinite space, challenging thought and capable of intellectual interpretation; and in this act of interpretation he is thinking the thoughts of some mind that

has been embodied in and impressed upon these things which call forth thought. Hence, when Kepler exclaimed, "O God, I think thy thoughts after thee!" he was not only journeying through nature to God, but even more through mind and intelligence to God.

Mind can interpret and explain rationally only that which comes from mind and reason. If thought did not make nature, thought could never interpret it, for nothing but the work of thought is intelligible to thought. But thought is the most distinctive attribute and exercise of personality; only in a person does it originate, and only by a person can it be understood.<sup>1</sup>

How an intelligible could be without an intelligence, both creative and receptive, is a thing which experience does not know and thought cannot conceive—for we are so constituted that we are bound to infer that the world of nature which none but a personal intellect can interpret, none but a personal intelligence could create. Experience and observation, says Principal Shairp, have forced upon the mind of all thoughtful naturalists, that, penetrate into nature whenever they may, thought has been there before them. If nature, therefore, is intelligible, if it is something that mind can and does interpret—and that it is intelligible and capable of rational interpretation is at the foundation of all science and philosophy—it must be related to and derive its intelligibility from a Personal Intelligence, from an intelligent Person, adequate to account for all the marks of intelligence possessed by it. The intelligibility of nature, and the intelligence possessed by man that enables him to interpret nature must find their explanation in a common origin from one and the same Personality, a Personality which cannot be inappropriately designated as supernatural—superhuman—Divine.

#### 4. *Through the Heart to God*

"Our hearts are restless until they find rest in Thee," exclaimed St. Augustine in an oft-quoted prayer that has found an echo in the heart of humanity. And if these words be

<sup>1</sup> See Fairbairn, "Philosophy of Christian Religion," p. 29.

the expression of a great truth, then it must be also true that one of the surest paths of approach to God, to his nature and character as well as to the fact of his existence, is through the heart with its emotions and desires. Indeed, it is through the heart rather than through the head that most men come first to believe in God. Faith is not the fruit of a purely intellectual process. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness," said one who understood well the psychology of the human soul and the philosophy of saving faith. Belief in God, for most men at least, does not lie at the end of a path of inquiry in which the motive is the desire to explore and explain the causes of things but it first manifests itself in the soul in a form in which feeling plays a more conscious and important part than does intellectual reasoning.

To say that God must be sought through the intellect and translated into the terms of the intellect as the only way, or indeed, as the best way, to find him, is to misplace the point of greatest emphasis and significance in religious experience. "The intellect has a great office in religion, and nothing which is in fundamental quarrel with it can be true. But God's plans outrun the sweep of our minds, or they would not be his thoughts," says Dr. W. H. Fitchett, "and the point at which God and man meet is that of the submitted will and the loving heart. God himself *has* intellect in infinite terms, but he *is* love; and it is in terms of love and at the point of love that God and man meet. Not the clever brain, but the loving heart best understands God. 'Beloved,' says John, 'let us love one another, for love is of God, and every one that loves is born of God and knows God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.' In these simple words is hidden a profounder philosophy than Plato knew. When Paul wants to describe how and by what channels in our nature God reveals himself to us, he says, 'God who commanded light to shine out of darkness hath shined *in our hearts* to give the light of the knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' If God pours the sunshine of his love into human hearts, it is surely to furnish light to shine on the pathway that leads to him.

Desires and feelings are a no less real and important part of man's real and true self than his thoughts and volitions. Most human beings can be influenced more effectively through the heart, by an appeal to their feelings and desires, than through the head by an appeal to reason and thought. Mankind is in a sense more conscious of feelings than of thoughts, of desires than of ideas. Whatever, then, would explain man, his origin, nature, and end, must explain and satisfy his heart, with its deep desires and feelings. Man's heart was made to love, and the only thing that can satisfy love is something that can be loved and can love in return. Strictly speaking, we do not love things; we like things, but we love persons; we love those who can respond to love and love us in return.

A conception of God that satisfies the head simply and not the heart, that answers the demands of reason but does not meet the desires and longings of the soul, is totally inadequate to meet man's deepest needs. Heathen gods satisfy neither the head nor the heart. The gods of polytheism may be feared, but they are never loved. Pantheism, with its immanent but impersonal deity, may appeal to the reason, at least of some, but it can never appeal to the heart of any man and evoke his love. Deism, with its distant deity, its transcendent "absentee God," totally indifferent to man's thoughts and feelings and doings, can never satisfy the heart of beings who crave, as mankind does, companionship and communion of soul with soul. Even Hebrew monotheism, with its lofty conception of duty and its emphasis upon God's unity, spirituality and personality, although incomparably more rational and satisfying than any other ancient conception of deity, was yet not adequate for all man's needs of head and heart; and so God gave the needed fuller and final revelation in and through his incarnate Son. It is only when God is revealed as the Son reveals him, as a Father, and only as this revelation is made plain to man by the Son taking human form and becoming incarnate, that man's heart is fully satisfied. It is because man's deepest attribute is love, and because none but a God who is at once a loving and holy Father can satisfy that love, that the Christian revelation of God finds ready acceptance.

wherever it is fully presented to the heart of man. "God is your heavenly Father," "God is love"—this is the revelation of God that captures the heart of humanity. To know the Father is to love him; but they only know him truly who love him. Knowledge comes before love, but a higher and better knowledge comes after love.

As Dr. Mansel has observed in his "Limits of Religious Thought," those who lay exclusive stress on the rational proof of the existence of God derived from the marks of design in the world or from the necessity of supposing a first cause for all phenomena overlook the fact that man learns to pray before he learns to reason, and that he feels within him the consciousness of a Supreme Being and the instinct of worship before he is capable of arguing from effects to causes, or of estimating the traces of wisdom and benevolence scattered through the creation. While it is true, as Dr. Fairbairn says, that "as man thinks of Deity, so he worships," it is also true that worship is an expression more of man's feelings than it is of his thoughts, and ministers more to the heart than it does to the head. Worship, therefore, whether it be viewed in its subjective aspect as an inner exercise of the spirit or in its outward expression and forms, is an approach to God through the feelings and an appeal to the emotional nature of man.

##### 5. *Through the Will to God*

A yet higher evidence of man's personality is found in his possession of free will. The essence of freedom is in the self-determining power of the will; and it is perhaps in the consciousness of this self-determining power that man becomes most conscious of his superiority over nature and of his kinship to God. Many things may influence the will, but nothing can cause or force it to any given volition while it remains free. In his thoughts and desires man is more or less passive and dependent on the conditions and circumstances that environ him; but in his volitions he is active and free, and within limits absolute and sovereign. Our conception of power is derived from volition, from the manner in which, by a decision of our wills, we cause our bodies and other material things

to do our bidding and serve our purpose. Our wills can cause, originate, create; and, by means of their power over physical nature, give us, as nothing else does or can, a conception of divine power, of God as Creator. Logically the intellect and the sensibilities, or knowledge and desire, must precede the volitions of the will and furnish motives to the will. Free will is not merely self-determining power; it is self-determining power acting intelligently, rationally, with an end in view, and in harmony with certain moral qualities of the soul. For a will to act otherwise, to act arbitrarily, without reference to these conditions, with no motive or end in view, is for it to be unmoral and irrational. Free will, then, as we have already stated, is, in a sense, the divinest thing in man, in that he may be said to transcend nature and approach Deity more truly in the exercise of free will and in the act of volition than in anything else he does.

Where did this subtlest and most marvellous power possessed by man come from? From mindless matter? From something which is inert and motionless unless moved irresistibly from within or without? From other matter which, though always moving, can no more cease to move, or move otherwise than it does, than can inert matter cease to be inert? If life can come only from pre-existing life, and mind can come only from pre-existing mind, surely self-conscious free-will, which is the highest expression of life and the highest exercise of mind, can only come from a Being who is himself possessed of free will.

A true and lofty conception of man as a free moral agent leads to a lofty conception of God; low and degraded views of man's freedom make high and noble views of God impossible. Pantheism and materialism both alike make free will impossible in man, and they lead to degrading if not impossible views of Deity. People who have long been accustomed to an arbitrary and despotic government, where the imperious and sovereign will of one man has crushed into abject and servile obedience the wills of the people, and where the decrees of the sovereign have been dictated not by justice and love for his subjects but by unreasoning selfishness and

arbitrary power—such a people are very prone to interpret God from the point of view of sovereignty and give an exaggerated place to mere arbitrary power in their conception of God. The gods of such people are feared, but never loved.

"It was doubtless the experience of human volition that first suggested a belief in a personal God," says the author of "Christian Faith in an Age of Science," Dr. William North Rice. "The argument for the personality of God turns now chiefly on the manifestations in nature of something like the intellectual activities of man. The principle of causality forbids us to believe in an uncaused beginning. It compels us, therefore, to believe in the existence of something eternal and self-existent wherein lies the ground of all other existence. But the admission of an eternal and self-existent something leaves unanswered the question whether that something is unintelligent or intelligent, a blind force or a free and moral personality. The function of the argument from design is to establish the probability that the eternal self-existent something is intelligent. . . . The system of doctrine usually called pantheism denies personality, free will, morality, alike in man and in God. In the line of thought which we have followed, on the contrary, we have started with the personality of man, and at every stage have firmly held to the personality of God. Thus we find the ground of all existence in the will of a personal God." All theists may not agree with Dr. Rice in thinking that the experience of volition first suggested the idea of a personal God, but they will doubtless all agree with him in the validity of the analogy and the argument by which he undertakes to prove from the free will of men the fact of personality and will in God.

If, now, we are to reason from and through free will in man to the existence of an infinite and divine will in God, it is quite essential that our psychology and our theology shall define the human will in terms of a real and true freedom with conscious self-determining power. This neither materialism nor positivism nor pantheism can do. Even Calvinism, standing as it does for so much that is true in theology, has yet so unduly emphasised and exaggerated the arbitrary and sover-

eign Will of God in determining man's destiny that it leaves little or no room for free will in man. In answering the question "Whose will decides whether an individual shall be saved or lost—that of the individual or that of God?" Calvinism answers "the will of God"; all other types of theology answer, "the will of the individual free agent." If God has from all eternity unconditionally foreordained all things whatsoever come to pass, and this includes the volitions of men and angels—and such is the teaching of Calvinism—it is difficult to find a place for human free will to come into man's life in any determinative way. To affirm that God by the arbitrary decision of his own will, before men were created, decreed that a certain portion only of those whom he would create should be saved and that all others should be lost, might fill the hearts of the elect with unspeakable gratitude because of his discriminating favour, but it could not fail to prove a repellent conception of God to the masses of men who could not know whether they were elect or not.

To so define and magnify Will in the nature and attributes of God as to nullify and render impossible free will in man is to make it impossible to find in that which we call the will of man a pathway to God—and the argument to prove the existence of a Person who possesses in an unlimited degree the self-determining power which man possesses in a limited degree falls to the ground. The modern Christian conception of God which has supplanted that of Calvinism places its emphasis upon the Fatherhood and love of God and the self-determining power of free-will in man. While God possesses and exercises sovereign Will, yet back of his will are infinite wisdom and love; his will is always that of a holy and loving Father. To know and love and do the will of the Father in heaven is the highest act of the mind and heart and will of man. "Our wills are ours to make them thine." So wrote the poet, and no single sentence was ever perhaps penned by uninspired man that states a profounder truth than that sentence does concerning the human will as it is related to the divine Will. Man carries within his consciousness of freedom the consciousness of another free Will to whom he

owes obedience. This consciousness of the Divine Will reveals itself in conscience.

### 6. *Through the Conscience to God*

In addition to intellect and feeling and volition, the psychological study of man's nature in the laboratory of life and experience reveals a fourth element or faculty, that presupposes all these three but is different from each one of them; and is more than all of them. It is that by virtue of which man has a moral nature. We call it conscience. Theists regard it as the voice of God and the witness to God within the soul of man; and it requires, to make it possible for it to function in life, that there shall be an outward moral standard of right that shall be recognised as obligatory and authoritative by the conscience within.

What consciousness is to man as a thinking rational spirit, that conscience, the moral consciousness, is to man as ethical and rational. Conscience manifests itself in a recognition of the existence of a standard of right and an accompanying sense of obligation to bring conduct and character into conformity to that standard. But conscience does not create the standard—it simply apprehends and recognises and enforces it. Discernment and discrimination are attributes and functions of the intellect, and the intellect is fallible. Accordingly the actual and practical standard of one man, or of any given group of men, having a social conscience, may and often does differ from the standard recognised by another man or group of men. But conscience is always,—in those at least who are conscientious, those in whom it has not by being long unheeded become deaf or dead,—true to its recognised and accepted standard. Whatever is recognised as the standard of right, conscience is that feeling, that faculty, that authoritative voice of the soul, that insists that it shall be obeyed. Disobeyed, it smites the soul with a sense of guilt, from which there is no escape, except through penitence and pardon.

This faculty of the soul, this immediate and imperious sense of "oughtness," this "categorical imperative," as Kant called it, belongs to man as man—is found in all men, civilised or

uncivilised, educated or ignorant. It comes into being with man like mind as part of his equipment for life; it constitutes his moral nature which is not so much innate as connate, that is, something born with him, which awaits development, and its development is like the development of mind, is conditional on many things—on inheritance, on education, on social environment. These constitute the moral variables that characterise the manifestations of conscience as seen in different individuals and groups of men, but underneath all these variables there is a “moral constant” discernible alike in all; and however widely and variantly the standard of right may be interpreted by different individuals or groups or nations, there is discernible a moral constant, a common and universally accepted nucleus of moral truth, a moral ultimate, that is recognised by all men everywhere, and serves as the moral “common denominator” for mankind. That makes possible not only social intercourse among and between all men, but the solution of moral problems in a common “clearing-house” where the reconciling and unifying of variable moral standards is ever in process. Where, now, did this conscience of the race come from; and this ultimate standard of right, whence came it? There is but one rational explanation—it came from a moral source, and the only fitting name for that source is a personal God.

Dr. Martineau has said that psychological ethics is peculiar to Christianity. In Christianity human nature, rather than nature, became the sole object of interest and investigation. The world existed for man's sake; even the heavens were made to minister to man. The human soul was the one great object of the divine government. Naturally, therefore, Christian philosophy and ethics became deeply subjective and penetratingly introspective in their methods and aims. In Christian thought emphasis was ever laid on the law which is written in the heart.

#### *7. Through the Imagination to God*

There is no faculty of the human soul that is of more value in the discovery and the interpretation of God than the imag-

ination. It is a faculty which may be misused and abused, and when unchecked, unguided by wisdom, and carried to excess, it may easily be turned into unbridled fancy and lead the mind away from rather than towards truth and reality. But properly used it serves as the image-making power of the soul and as such it is one of the most valuable faculties with which man is endowed for finding truth and reality in every sphere of human knowledge. It was Napoleon who said that men of imagination rule the world. Not only must the military leader who has to plan his campaign of conquest and his line of battle be a man of imagination, but in the realm of science also imagination is, as Tyndall designated it, "the mightiest instrument of the physical discoverer." "The hypotheses which precede experiment could never be framed without imagination." All the great inventions are the result of imagination. The artist is the man possessed of a creative imagination; but "only the man in whom morality and religion are living principles can ever see deeply enough into the heart of things to become a true artist." Such was Ruskin's view.

"Since imagination, in its higher rational use," says a thoughtful writer, "is a means of grasping truth not open to the senses, it is a most important coadjutor, if not a necessary instrument, of reason in its loftiest investigations. Neither mathematics nor morals can make known their highest truths to the man of no imagination. The dull plodder within the circle of material facts will discern no connections between them, and will have no science. Although God is apprehended not by imagination but by reason, yet imagination is a most important help to religion, and we may almost say that some men have not imagination enough to be religious."

In no realm of human research is the imagination more useful—and, if rightly used, more trustworthy—than in the realm of religion, and most of all is it suggestive and helpful in conceiving of and interpreting God. The Creator has put his own divine ideas into things created, but it is only the man who is possessed of imagination and uses his imagination

that thinks God's thoughts after him. The creative imagination precedes and reveals the possibility of a thing, and creative power follows and makes the thing imagined to become real. The interpretative imagination of man, then, becomes a part of his intellectual and spiritual equipment for discovering the divine ideas embodied in the created universe. "What a wonderful imagination God has!" was the exclamation of Tennyson once in a thoughtful mood while contemplating the marvellous things to be seen in the created universe—in studying which these words have already been quoted. What the Creator first imagined and then made real, only a creature with imagination can interpret. Imagination is thus seen to be necessary in order to interpret the mind and handiwork of God in the created universe. The truly great theologian is he who, by imagination combined with faith, discovers God, interprets him and reveals him to others. It would be practically impossible for man, were he not possessed of imagination, to form in his mind an intelligible and worthy conception of God. The exercise of the imagination, therefore, is a pathway to God as rational and luminous as is the intellect, or the emotions, or the will, or the conscience.

Professor E. H. Johnson, in his volume titled "The Religious Use of the Imagination," says:—

"When the personality of God is clearly imagined, perfection no longer figures to our imagination as a phase of infinitude, and thus of incomprehensibility, but as exceedingly definite, that is, as delimitation by virtue of excluding imperfections. Thus, if we form a conception of divine holiness, it is not to be pictured as analogous to boundless space, but as moral energy *untouched* by evil. If we would contemplate God's infinite love, we imagine it as a desire for nothing else except our well-being. Infinite justice is a not inaccurate rendering of what is due to any one. Even infiniteness of knowledge is readily imaginable as knowledge which omits nothing, and wisdom as knowledge which makes no mistakes about what to do. . . . Whatever logical embarrassment may be met in attempting to infer what the infinite excellencies of God will lead him to do, we have an unquestionably correct

notion of what these attributes severally are, and may properly imagine God as all-perfect, that is, as a Person infinite only in all that good is."

### 8. *The New Psychology and the Christian Faith*

Of the various sciences that may be designated as non-physical none has received of late more attention and study than psychology. Indeed the recent developments in the study of man's psychological nature have been so notable and far-reaching as to lead many to distinguish the new from the old by referring to it as the "New Psychology." We naturally think in this connection of Professor William James, the eminent psychologist of Harvard University, and his well-known and widely read volume titled "Varieties of Religious Experience." The psychology of religion has found sane and helpful treatment at the hands of men like E. D. Starbuck, George Albert Coe and other authors that might be named and in so far as the new interpretation of man's spiritual nature that has resulted from this study has been made by Christian theists, it has helped towards a truer and more rational interpretation of the Divine Being. But unfortunately this new science has found development at the hands of others who are not Christians, or even theists, and in their hands it is of course far from being a pathway that leads to God. We, perhaps, cannot do better than to let one who has made careful study of this new science in regard to its bearing on Christian faith, give us his impressions. Rev. Cyril E. Hudson in his volume titled "Recent Psychology and the Christian Religion" says :

"There appears to be no necessary and irreconcilable conflict between Christianity and current psychology; while in more ways than one those concerned with the development of the spiritual life may learn something from these inquiries into the human *psyche* and its amazingly subtle and complex modes of behaviour. But we must at the same time go further and point out that, though both psychology and religion are concerned with man's spiritual nature, neither their methods of approach nor the aims they have in view are, or indeed

ought to be, the same. Christianity is a supernatural way of life, or it is nothing. What God offers to the human race in and through Jesus Christ is not primarily a moral code nor a series of philosophical propositions, nor a system of philanthropy, but the opportunity of living at another and higher level than the 'natural.' 'Lay hold on eternal life' is one of those texts of Scripture in which the essence of Christianity may be said to be embodied. . . . It is a doctrine fundamental to any orthodox form of Christianity that this divine life, this 'super-nature' which from all eternity Christ shares with the Father, and which is the essential principle of the Godhead itself, may be shared by mortal men and women here and now. With such conceptions as these psychology, as such, has not, and cannot have, any direct concern whatever.

"Psychoanalysis is a young child of science, and, like all children, is apt to be somewhat impatient with its elders. But, after all, Christianity is its elder, and has been grappling with the problems of the human soul for some twenty centuries—and not, we may say, without some measure of success. . . . Psychoanalysis has already accomplished much in the sphere of mental pathology. Who shall set limits to what it may some day achieve, not in abnormal cases only, but in the lives of ordinary men and women, hand in hand with Christian faith? . . .

"In the foregoing chapters on current psychological inquiries and the lessons to be drawn from them in regard to matters of religion, I have, for the most part, laid stress on the support they lend to Christian principles and practices. But it would be idle to pretend that this apparent *rapprochement* is the whole picture. So far from this being the case, it would be, on the whole, a more accurate account of the situation to say that where the protagonists of the New Psychology seem to support religion, they do so unwittingly and indirectly, and that when they discuss the subject directly we find them, almost to a man, emphatically and uncompromisingly antichristian."

In proof of this the author shows how Freud, the pioneer and apostle of this new science of psychoanalysis, and those who follow him, maintain a doctrine of "psychological determinism" which results in a purely mechanistic philosophy of

life involving the elimination of all belief alike in human freedom and in the existence of any supernatural Power capable of aiding and reinforcing human thought and conduct. Whatever philosophy of life destroys in men and women the sense of moral responsibility for their conduct and character and of accountability to a Divine Being for the deeds done in the body constitutes a pathway not to but away from God.<sup>1</sup>

It is to be devoutly hoped that the further and fuller development of the "New Psychology" will fall to the lot of those who, themselves believing in God and in the divine Christ, will make it a help and not a hindrance to both Christian believing and Christian living.

### *9. Human Psychology and the Divine Trinity*

Of the doctrines of revealed religion that which most of all transcends human reason is the doctrine of the Trinity—the doctrine that there is but one God, and yet in the unity of the divine nature there are three persons. It is difficult to find anything either in physical nature or in human nature to serve as an analogy for this truth. Many think that the nearest approach to a satisfactory illustration of the Trinity that has ever been suggested is found in psychology—in the fact that there is in man but one spiritual essence, but this one spirit exists as intellect, feeling, and will. These three are thoroughly distinct and are yet so vitally related as to constitute in the human consciousness but one spiritual being. Man is one in one sense and three in another sense. The whole man is in each—the whole man thinks, the whole man feels, and the whole man wills—and yet each represents the whole and, in some true sense, is the whole spiritual man. The mind is the man, the heart is the man, the will is the man—we have here three in one and one in three—three in one sense and one in another sense. It is consciousness that blends all three into one with a unity which, though allowing each to be distinguished from the other, makes it impossible to separate the one from the other.

<sup>1</sup> See "Recent Psychology and the Christian Religion," pp. 66-69 and 98-100.

If there is something here of real value to illustrate the doctrine of the Trinity, it must be conceded that the analogy is by no means complete, and therefore, the illustration (as is true of all illustrations ever suggested for this purpose) must be recognised as inadequate and imperfect. In the meantime we can believe *that a thing is*, without being able fully to comprehend how it is. Just as we know that we not merely have but *are* mind and heart and will, and yet are conscious of our essential and absolute oneness; so we can believe that the infinite God is and can be but one in essence, and yet that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Spirit is God. Psychology, therefore, revealing man to himself not only as a spiritual unity but as a thinking mind, a feeling heart, and a self-determining will, renders a real service to theology in making more intelligible and comprehensible, at least for some minds, this most difficult doctrine in the Christian religion.

### III

#### MAN'S SOCIAL RELATIONS AND GOD

In psychology we study man as an individual; and in the preceding pages we have confined our study to his subjective and spiritual nature, finding therein much to aid us in our conception and interpretation of God. But man's larger life is lived outside of himself in fellowship with others. His relationships to others occupy much more of his consideration than do his thoughts about what he is within himself. His first thought is of mother and father; and in social fellowship with them and others in the home life begins; and later in due time it passes out into larger social relationships. From the various relationships of life we select for consideration two as having much in them that lead to the thought of God.

##### *I. Through Parenthood to God*

"Through Parenthood to God," suggests that one of the most helpful ways of approaching God is from and through a consideration of that most real and precious of all human

relationships—that of parenthood, of mother and child, of father and son. No conception and revelation of God is quite so dear to us as that which comes through the contemplation of the Divine Being as the infinite and perfect and eternal realisation to us of that which fatherhood and motherhood mean to us here. Our familiarity with the origin of life in parenthood does not in any way explain its deep mystery; but rather forces upon us the conviction that a mystery so profound can only find its ultimate explanation in One who is in a sense the Parent of all life, and in an altogether appropriate sense of all beings possessed of spiritual life and bearing the divine image.

The first conception that most human beings have of God is derived from their parents; and parental instruction imparted to children nearly always represents more or less faithfully the prevailing religious ideas of the country in which a child is born. In most cases a certain amount of religious instruction by other teachers intensifies and enlarges the knowledge of God that has been received from parents. Every thoughtful person upon arriving at an age of intellectual maturity finds himself in possession of a certain idea of God; he scarcely knows how or why he has come to hold this view. But he ere long begins to think for himself and to have thoughts of his own concerning God. He begins to ask himself questions about God before he asks others; he begins to reason about his own existence and nature. What is he? Where did he come from? What is he here for? His father and mother—what does parenthood and childhood mean? What is life? From thoughts like these about his own existence and nature, he begins to think and reason about the existence and nature of a Divine Being and his relation to him.

Among all the approaches to the conception of God which a study of the nature of man and his human relationship suggests, that of parenthood is the most suggestive, because it is the easiest and most natural. From the parent comes the life of the child. Why should it not be, to reason from analogy, that all things finite and natural come from a divine Parent,

from a Being infinite and supernatural? The parent is in a sense the originator of the life of the child, and is the one who, in the loving exercise of authority, rules over and commands the child, and to whom the child renders obedience. It would seem easy to pass from this to divine parenthood. No revelation of God that has ever been made has appealed to mankind so universally and has met with such ready acceptance everywhere as Christ's revelation of God as the Father of men. The wonder is that under the patriarchal system of the Old Testament it did not find its way into Hebrew thought and theology far back in Hebrew history.

We have already called attention to primitive and heathen attempts to interpret God in terms of sex. So there have been occasional efforts on the part of theistic writers to interpret the Trinity of the Godhead in terms of a divine Fatherhood in God, Motherhood in the Holy Spirit, and Sonship in Christ, but it has not been accomplished in a measure and with a force and plausibility sufficient to commend itself to the Christian mind. In God the Father, as he has been revealed by Christ, are found all the mother virtues; and we are safe in assuming that Christ would have revealed the Motherhood in the Godhead if it had been a reality. But the idea of the Parenthood of God does not require, for its perfect realisation, that the analogy between human life and divine life shall be complete, and that the human relationship of the father, mother and child shall be reproduced in the realm of Spirit "where they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven."

## 2. *Through Government to God*

Man cannot live alone; he is a social being. Men by a very instinct of nature come together in groups; they are associated not merely in families, but families are associated together in tribes. Kindred tribes again find a larger unity in races; and people of different tribes and races, intermingling in one and the same country, may constitute a nation. When men come together in any one of these group-formation, some kind of organisation and government becomes a neces-

sity; a family must have its patriarchal head; a tribe must have its chief; a race must have its ruler; a nation must have its official head. Organised government, to be effective, must invest its ruler or governor with authority. An ideal ruler would be one who possesses physical, intellectual, moral and social powers above his fellows. In proportion as one or all of these qualities of leadership meet in him will he have pre-eminence and power as a governor. From the beginning of human history men have thus been accustomed to look up to and obey some one as their governor or ruler. When, therefore, men think of a Divine Being above and over them, to whom they are subject, nothing could be more natural than for them to interpret the Divine Sovereign by and through their earthly rulers. It is in this manner that we discover in the conception of human government a pathway to the Divine Governor and Government.

Both the physical and the moral universe alike demand a Governor. It is not according to reason to say that the physical world is governed by the laws of nature as if law were in itself an entity and a power. Law in all other realms means nothing except as it is the expression of the free will of a rational personality. Law is the uniform mode according to which an intelligent free will acts. Instead of saying, therefore, that this world is governed by the laws of nature, we should rather say that the world is governed by God according to the laws of nature—and this is none the less appropriate language if God be conceived of as immanent, governing nature *ab intra* rather than *ab extra*. And still more does the moral universe, composed of all the myriads of free and rational beings in existence, call for a Governor. Seeing that all aggregations of men must have a ruler, a king, a governor, can the intellectual universe, composed of rational beings, come into existence, and continue in existence, without a ruler? Can the moral universe, composed of moral free agents whose very existence is a ceaseless struggle between right and wrong, be conceived of as utterly without a Divine Governor? Our earthly citizenship reveals to us the citizenship of all men in the Kingdom of God.

Strictly speaking government is a term that applies only to beings who are rational and moral free agents. God's relation to the ongoing of physical nature is that of conservation rather than government; just as his relation to all living things is that of providential care rather than government. It is only by an enlarged and accommodated use of "government" that we can apply the term to any creatures below the grade of rational beings.

"A world of things needs no government; or, rather, government has no meaning when applied to them. We can speak of government only where there are beings who by a certain independence threaten to withdraw themselves from the general plan which the ruler aims to realise. We find the proper subjects of a divine government only in finite spirits, as only these have that relative independence over against God which the idea of government demands. The notion of a divine government, then, implies free spirits as its subjects. But freedom in itself is a means only and not an end. Apart from some good which can be realised only by freedom, a free world is no better than a necessary one. Hence the notion of a world-government acquires rational meaning only as some supreme good exists which is to be the outcome of creation . . . what then, is that great end which all free beings should serve? We can find a sufficient world-goal only in the moral realm. A community of moral persons, obeying moral law and enjoying moral blessedness, is the only end that could excuse creation or make it worth while."<sup>1</sup> Hence the very notion and necessity of moral government among men leads at once to the ethical realm, to the conclusion that there must be a moral government of the universe.

Some years ago Dr. George A. Gordon preached a notable sermon in his church in Boston, the leading thought of which was developed under two heads: (1) This world of rational and moral free-agents, God's best opportunity, and (2) This world just as it is man's best opportunity. Here in our world God, the Creator and Governor of free moral beings, and man, the rational free agent, both have their best opportunity for

<sup>1</sup> Bowne, "Theism," pp. 230-231.

achieving the truly divine and the truly human. A thought somewhat similar is found in one of his published volumes:—

“Christianity is the interpretation of the Eternal, not through nature but through human nature; not through the lower expressions of the creative power but through man, the highest expression. The creation at its best gives us the Creator at his best; the highest man is the supreme revelation of God. The incarnation of God in Jesus, the perfect man, in all men as moral beings, in all good men as the life of their life, is the fundamental idea in my philosophy of existence. The greatest thing that we know is man, the greatest man that we know is Jesus Christ; and our worthiest thought of God regards him as the God and Father of Jesus Christ. The humanity of God is given in the humanity of man; it is given supremely in the humanity of Jesus.” We ascend to God through man, and especially through Jesus the perfect man; and through man, pre-eminently through Jesus the perfect man, God descends to us. “A system,” Dr. Fairbairn has said, “whose crown and centre is the Divine Man is one which does justice to everything positive in humanity by penetrating it everywhere with Deity. The incarnation as thus interpreted is the truth which turns nature and man, history and religion, into the luminous dwelling place of God.”

O Son of God incarnate,  
 O Son of Man divine,  
 In whom God's glory dwelleth,  
 In whom man's virtues shine,  
 God's light to earth thou bringest  
 To drive sin's night away,  
 And, through thy life so radiant,  
 Earth's darkness turns to day.

O Mind of God incarnate,  
 O Thought in flesh enshrined,  
 In human form thou speakest  
 To men the Father's mind:  
 God's thought to earth thou bringest  
 That men in thee may see  
 What God is like, and, seeing,  
 Think God's thoughts after thee.

O Heart of God incarnate,  
Love-bearer to mankind,  
From thee we learn what love is,  
In thee love's ways we find:  
God's love to earth thou bringest  
In living deeds that prove  
How sweet to serve all others,  
When we all others love.

O Will of God incarnate,  
So human, so divine,  
Free wills to us thou givest  
That we may make them thine:  
God's will to earth thou bringest  
That all who would obey  
May learn from thee their duty,  
The truth, the life, the way.

W. F. T.

CHAPTER EIGHT  
THROUGH PHILOSOPHY TO GOD



## CHAPTER EIGHT

### THROUGH PHILOSOPHY TO GOD

"In philosophy," Lord Bacon has said, in language that seems now somewhat quaint, "the contemplations of man do either penetrate unto God, or are circumferred to nature, or are reflected or reverted upon himself; out of which several inquiries there do arise three knowledges, Divine philosophy, natural philosophy and human philosophy. The object-matter of philosophy, therefore, may be distinguished as God, nature and man." The second of these subjects we have considered in the chapter titled "Through Nature to God"; and the third, "human philosophy," we have been studying in the chapter titled "Through Man to God"—through human nature and psychology to God. The manner in which nature and man have here been studied, as pathways to God, would doubtless classify these studies, under Lord Bacon's definition, as belonging to "Divine philosophy." But we come now more directly to consider "Divine philosophy," human thought as related to God—its subject and its object, its origin and its end. It is impossible for a philosopher to be true to his high calling—to think things through to their cause, to trace them back to their ultimate sources, to discover why things are just what they are, and what is their final end—without thinking of God, who he is, or what he is, and how he acts and relates himself to finite things. The history of philosophy reveals the fact that the most illustrious and influential philosophers of the past have been theists who believed profoundly in the existence of a personal God.

#### I

### OURS A RATIONAL UNIVERSE

"Let us begin, then," said Plato, "by asking whether all this which men call the universe is left to the guidance of an

irrational and random chance, or, on the contrary, as our fathers declared, is ordered and governed by a marvellous intelligence and wisdom." And a modern follower of Plato has said that the human intellect could not live unless it were embosomed by a universe which is in its constitution and contents as rational as itself, seeing that reason could not live in a world where no reason is.

### 1. *What Is Philosophy?*

Philosophy means etymologically the love of wisdom. The love of knowledge, the desire to know, is the inspiration of man in his pursuit of that knowledge which is the aim and end of philosophy. Surrounded as man is by the ever-changing phenomena of nature, he desires and seeks to know what things are, what causes them to change, what is behind and what is before these changes. Preceding and underlying all philosophical inquiries, therefore, concerning nature, man and God, there comes what has been called "the first philosophy, that which seeks to ascertain the grounds or principles of knowledge, and the causes of all things." Hence philosophy, in this primary sense, has been defined as "the science of causes and principles"; and its peculiar province is to investigate the principles on which all knowledge and all being ultimately rest. Whatever challenges human thought and inquiry, becomes a problem for philosophy to investigate, to seek to understand, to solve, and to explain. The mind of man seeks certitude, and, although it often cannot go beyond speculation and plausible hypothesis, it can rest satisfied only when facts have been gathered, and properly related to each other, and so interpreted as to necessitate conclusions so trustworthy that they are accredited as knowledge. Philosophy is founded on the trustworthiness of knowledge, and therefore on the reliability of the rational processes by which it is attained. "Philosophy," Ferrier, the Scotch philosopher, says, "is the attainment of truth by the way of reason"; and with equal propriety and similar phraseology, we may define theistic philosophy as the attainment of truth concerning God by the way of reason.

There is nothing more important in the study of the philosophy of religion than that of rightly relating religion to reason, and authority to truth. Timid souls often manifest needless concern about making religion religious, and about giving authority to truth. But what we need to be most concerned about is making religion rational—is seeing that religion has reason in it and back of it in all that it teaches and enjoins. What we need to be most concerned about is not to protect truth by authority but rather that authority shall be supported by reason and clothed with truth. Reason and truth are the things that give religion its authority over the minds and consciences of intelligent, thinking men. When a religion, or a Church, or a creed is more concerned about clothing itself with authority and having its authority recognised and obeyed than it is with providing itself with reason and clothing itself with truth and having its truth recognised, it is on the road to decay and death. The philosophical study of religion means the use of reason to reach truth, and seeks to lay the foundations of religious faith in reason, and in truth. To do this it must rightly interpret God who is the source of all reason and all truth. The nature and will of God, or the will of God as the perfect expression of his nature, is that which makes truth to be what it is as opposed to error. God endowed man with reason, one of his own attributes, that men might by the use of reason reach truth—and to find ultimate truth means to find God.

The only condition on which reason could have nothing to do with religion, says Dr. Fairbairn, is that religion should have nothing to do with truth. For in every controversy concerning what is or what is not truth, reason and not authority is the supreme arbiter. The authority that decides against reason commits itself to a conflict which is certain to issue in its defeat. The man who distrusts reason distrusts the God who gave it, and distrusts also the most efficient of all the servants he has bidden work within and upon man in behalf of the truth.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Philosophy of the Christian Religion," pp. 18, 19. In thus referring to and quoting from this work so frequently I am showing in the best manner

2. *Relation of Philosophy to Science*

Looked at in the light of what it aims to reach by the way of reason, philosophy is described by Calderwood as a rational explanation of things existing and of things occurring, and is distinguished from science in these words: "Science is the rational explanation of external phenomena, by discovery of invariable sequence in their occurrence, and postulating accordingly a law of nature, its object being to show *how* the phenomena exist. Philosophy is the ultimate rational explanation of things, obtained by discovery of the reason of their existence, or by showing *why* they exist." "Man first examines phenomena," says Professor William Fleming, "but he is not satisfied until he has reduced them to their causes, and, when he has done so, he asks to determine the value of the knowledge to which he has attained. This is philosophy properly so called—the mother and governing science—the science of sciences."

While it is the province of science simply to discover the laws of nature in its various realms, and to study and report on what is learned as to how these laws work, it is quite impossible for the thoughtful scientific worker not to indulge in speculations as to the originating and final causes of things—in thoughts which belong to the sphere of philosophy. It is in the interests of truth, and a thing to be desired, that scientists and philosophers—and theologians also—should keep in close touch with each other and go forth hand in hand for the discovery of truth. The scientist's influence tends to keep the philosopher's feet down on the solid foundations of facts but for which his thought may soar far afield and become mere speculative visions rather than, what they ought to be, true interpretations of present realities as well as of eternal spiritual verities.

possible my appreciation of and indebtedness to a volume which, though published several years ago, should long continue to be read and studied, especially by young ministers.

*3. Mind a Function of Spirit, Not of Matter*

Materialism teaches that mind has no existence except as a function of the body—that it is a resultant and product of the physical organisation, particularly that part of it found in the brain. In direct and total opposition to this conception is that of philosophic idealism which says that matter has no existence except in and through and for the mind, and has no attributes except what mind gives to it. Neither of these views is true according to theistic philosophic realism which teaches that there are two entities in our world, matter and spirit, the one as real as the other, each possessed of attributes distinct and different from the other. According to the last-named view, which may be called the prevalent view among theists generally, man is a physico-spiritual being uniting the two entities in himself; but mind and thought and consciousness are functions of his spirit and not of his physical body. The physical, fleshly body encases and incarnates the spirit which, because of its dominance over the body, and even more because of the attributes which it possesses by virtue of its relationship to the infinite Spirit, is regarded as the real man. Man *has* a body, but he *is* a spirit. The body is his servant, an instrument to do his bidding, but nevertheless so vitally related to him as to condition and limit the activity of his spirit.

Materialism pure and simple is utterly incompatible with any theistic explanation of the origin of life and of mind and of their continued existence after death. It holds that "the brain secretes thought as the liver secretes bile," or, to present the doctrine in more refined form "that consciousness, thought, feeling, volition, are phenomena of the nervous organism, as magnetism is the property of lodestone." Thought is compared to "a flame which first burns faintly, then more brightly, then flickers, and at length goes out, as the material source of combustion is consumed or dissipated." "Thought is the result of chemical or mechanical changes in the brain, an idea being nothing but an explosion or discharge of a brain-cell, and an emotion being the bursting into flame of several brain

cells." Matter is endowed with a mental potency called "mind-stuff, which in the process of evolution forms itself into brain-cells which become not only the physical basis but the producing cause of thought, feeling and volition." The physical energy that functions in the form of mind-force, being indestructible, as all energy is, on being dissolved in one combination by death, awaits the call of nature in evolution to enter into some new combination and form some new brain-cells. God, on this theory, is nothing more nor less than the "Mind-stuff" of Universal Nature spelt with capital letters, and interpreted in terms of deity.<sup>1</sup>

#### 4. *Evidences of Mind in the Physical Universe*

If, as Lord Kelvin has said, an atom bears the marks of being a "manufactured article," and therefore something constructed by mind, much more truly may we say of the aggregation of related atoms in this world of ours, that the entire mass of matter is a "manufactured article," in the structure and composition of which we can discern both matter and mind. In the building of a house we distinguish different causes thus:—the material cause is the wood, brick, or stone used in its construction; the formal cause is the plan in the mind of the architect; the efficient cause is the carpenters, bricklayers, or other workmen who put the material in shape in accordance with the plan of the architect; the final cause is the purpose for which the building is erected, a home, bank, store, factory. But that which is last in realisation is first in mind. The final cause is that which determines and provides all the other causes, and is therefore the real cause without which the thing caused would not be. Incidentally we may observe that the scientist has to do principally with the first and third of these causes, while the second and fourth belong chiefly to the sphere of philosophy.

To say that atoms and the aggregation of atoms in the material universe bear the marks of being "manufactured" must not be interpreted as turning God into a "carpenter"

<sup>1</sup> See Fisher's "Grounds of Theistic and Christian Belief," pp. 68 and 72.

whose method of work in nature is *ab extra* and not *ab intra*. Out of elements in the soil and the air some force that we call life is "manufacturing" the plant. If the "manufacturer" is conceived of and interpreted as impersonal force, the resultant philosophy is materialistic. If, on the other hand, the manufacturer be none other than the immanent personal God working from within, the resultant philosophy is theistic.

"While the mind of man looketh upon second causes scattered,"—we quote Lord Bacon again—"it may sometimes rest in them and go no farther; but when it beholdeth the chain of them confederate and linked together, it must needs fly to Providence and Deity."

If it takes mind to create and construct, then it follows that whatever is constructed by mind is rational—is something intelligible, interpretable by mind. We have then, in order: first, the creative mind; second, the intelligible creation, and third, the interpreting mind—that is, first, God; second, nature; third, man. Nature evolves the thoughts which God involves in it and stamps upon it. Hence to study nature and discern the marks of mind in it is, as Kepler expressed it, "to think God's thoughts after him." And, when man brings together and relates these individual thoughts of God to each other as they are expressed in nature, his combination and arrangement of these thoughts of God constitute a classification of the laws of nature. This is why Agassiz, the eminent theistic scientist of Harvard University, once said that "thorough classification is an interpretation of the thoughts of God." If "knowing" be something more than "thinking" it, too, may be defined in somewhat similar terms, as Ueberweg, author of the well known "History of Philosophy," has done: "The act of knowing, in so far as it is the copying in the human consciousness of the essence of the thing, is an *after-thinking* of the thoughts which the Divine creative thinking has built into things; in *action* (divine and human) the preceding thought determines what actually exists, but in *knowing*, the actual existence, in itself conformable to reason, determines the human thought."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "System of Logic," p. 2.

But a rational interpretation of the universe means also an ethical and spiritual interpretation of it, if Thomas Carlyle was right when he said that "there is a divine idea pervading the visible universe, which is, indeed, but its symbol and sensible manifestation, having in itself no meaning, or even true existence, independent of it. Although to the mass of men this divine idea lies hidden, yet to discern it, and seize it, and live wholly in it, is the condition of all genuine virtue, knowledge, freedom, and the end, therefore, of all spiritual effort in every age."

### 5. *Can Chance Explain Our World?*

Our world must have come to be what it is either by chance or through the direction of some designing mind. To say that a thing happens by chance does not mean that it comes to pass uncaused—for nothing happens in the universe without a cause—but it means that it happened without being planned or designed. "Chance is opposed not to the caused, but to the purposed." "We cannot speak of accidental *occurrences*, but we may speak of accidental *concurrences*," says Dr. James McCosh.<sup>1</sup> "Facts casually conjoined," says John Stuart Mill, "are separately the effects of causes, and therefore of laws, but of different causes, and causes not connected by any law. It is incorrect, then, to say that any phenomenon is produced by chance; but we may say that two or more phenomena are conjoined by chance, meaning that they are in no way related through causation, that they are neither cause and effect, nor effects of the same cause, nor effects of causes between which there subsists any law of coexistence, nor even effects of the same original law of collocation."<sup>2</sup>

The issue, then, between theistic philosophy and atheistic

<sup>1</sup> "Typical Forms and Special Ends in Creation," p. 44

<sup>2</sup> "Many things happen besides what man intends or purposes; and also some things happen different from what is aimed at by nature. We cannot call them natural things, or from nature, neither can we say that they are from human intention. They are what we call fortuitous events, and the cause which produces them is called chance. But they all have respect to some end intended by nature or by man. So that nothing can be more true than what Aristotle says, that if there were no end intended, there could be no such thing as chance." (Fleming's "Vocabulary of Philosophy.")

materialism is not as to whether anything or all things have occurred and are occurring in this world uncaused and by chance, but whether all the concurrences that come together in the realm of matter and life in this world have come by chance, that is, without purpose and design, or, on the other hand, as a result of purpose and design on the part of an Intelligent Cause, a designing Mind. Archbishop Tillotson's statement of the case for theism is none the less forceful because it is more than two hundred years old: "How often might a man, after he had jumbled a set of letters in a bag, fling them out upon the ground before they would fall into an exact poem, yea, or so much as make a good discourse in prose? And may not a little book be as easily made by chance as this great volume of the world? How long might a man be sprinkling colours upon canvas with a careless hand before they would happen to make the exact picture of a man? And is a man easier made by chance than his picture? How long might twenty thousand blind men, which should be sent out from the several remote parts of England, wander up and down before they would all meet upon Salisbury Plain, and fall into rank and file in the exact order of an army? And yet this is much more easy to be imagined than that the innumerable blind parts of matter should rendezvous themselves into a world."

The author of "The Religion of Science" has presented the same argument and reached the same conclusion by the use of a homely illustration: "A bird could make no scratches on the ground with its feet that man could read; the bird puts no mind in the prints of its feet for the mind of man to interpret. Man can decipher the strange letters on an Egyptian obelisk because the letters embody mind, and mind common to him and those who made the hieroglyphics. Man can read and interpret nature, but he can do so only because it contains mind, and mind like unto his own mind. Therefore the mind embodied in nature and the mind active in man can come together, because they both are expressions of one infinite Mind."

## II

IDEALISM AND REALISM IN PHILOSOPHY AND  
THEOLOGY

Philosophers are divided into realists and idealists in their interpretations of matter and all things external to the mind. The trend of philosophic and theistic thought in its conception of matter and its attributes and laws, in recent times has been not only away from realism, but pronouncedly idealistic; but present day thinkers, it seems to me, are more and more expressing their views in terms of realism.

*I. Philosophic and Theistic Idealism*

The most notable feature of idealistic philosophy is found not in what it affirms but in what it denies. This appears not only in what those who are not idealists say in criticism of it, but in what the exponents of this philosophical system themselves say of it—as, for example, will appear in the following quotation from its leading champion among English philosophers, which begins by “denying the denials” of idealism:—

“In denying to the things perceived by sense an existence independent of a substance or support wherein they may exist,” says Bishop Berkeley, the most eminent exponent of philosophic idealism, “we detract nothing from the received opinion of their reality, and are guilty of no innovation in that respect. All the difference is that according to us the unthinking beings perceived by sense have no existence distinct from being perceived, and therefore cannot exist in any other substance than those *unextended, indivisible, substances or spirits*, which act, think, and perceive them.”

Idealism in philosophy and its implications are thus defined by those who have made a careful and comprehensive study of what it both affirms and denies:

The idealist says, according to Ribot, the author of “Contemporary English Psychology,” that “there is only one existence, the mind. Analyse the conception of matter, and you will discover that it is only a mental synthesis of qualities.

Our knowledge is subjective." "Idealism," says Calderwood, "blots out matter from existence, and affirms that mind is the only reality." "Idealism denies the existence or the immediate knowledge of the external world, or matter, and maintains that nothing exists, or is known, except minds." The essence of Berkeley's position, according to a writer in the "Encyclopædia Britannica," is this: "The universe is inconceivable apart from mind,—that existence as such, denotes conscious spirits and the objects of consciousness. Matter and external things, in so far as they are thought to have an existence beyond the circle of consciousness, are impossible, inconceivable, absurd."

But to be fair to theistic idealism we must let one or more of its best representatives speak for it.

The late Dr. Borden P. Bowne is ranked as an idealist in philosophy and is considered one of the greatest and most influential of American writers and teachers who represent this school of philosophic thought. He has, however, not merely reproduced the lines of thought marked out by Berkeley. He claims to have reinterpreted this system of thought and to have given formal expression to a type of idealism which escapes the errors and weaknesses of traditional idealism and embodies all the essential truth there is in realism. In holding that the phenomenal world exists only in and through and for the mind he is an idealist, but he feels that to stop here justifies to a greater or less extent the objection and criticism of the common mind that "idealism reduces the external world to a discontinuous set of impressions in scattered minds." He claims that his interpretation and system of idealism makes it possible to maintain at once the subjectivity of the phenomenal world, that is its existence, not in itself, but only in and for mind; and also its universality, that is its existence for all minds. Such an idealism differs from realism he declares, only in the one point of denying an extra-mental existence to the phenomenal world. Persons have, he says, "ontological otherness to the Infinite." But our concern is not so much with the truth or the error of his form of idealism as it is to see how he makes his philosophy a pathway to God. That he does this as

few modern philosophers have done is not open to question as the following paragraph will show:

"Let us say, then, that the world is essentially a going forth of divine Causality under the forms of space and time, and in accordance with a rational plan. The outcome of this activity is the phenomenal world, which is neither outside nor inside of God in a spatial sense, but which exists in unpicturable dependence upon the Divine Will; as our thoughts are neither outside nor inside of the mind in a spatial sense, but depend upon the mind as their cause and subject. This world, being independent of us, has all the continuity, uniformity, and objectivity which an extra-mental system could have; and, as distinct from individual delusion, is real and universal. Indeed, it is hard to say what this view should be called. In distinction from the idealism [nihilism] of sensationalism, it is realism. It is realistic, also, in affirming an objective cosmic system independent of finite thinking. It is idealistic, on the other hand, in maintaining that this system is essentially phenomenal and exists only in and for, as well as through, intelligence. Over against the human reason whereby nature exists for us is a Supreme Reason, through and in which nature has its real existence."<sup>1</sup>

If a realist affirms that all things material are in themselves really and exactly what they seem to be, provided they seem to be what they really are, is his statement a meaningless truism? Not so meaningless as many of the statements made by philosophical idealists. If it be true that the thing known is always the cause of the knowledge of it, and not the knowledge the cause of the thing known, idealism cannot be true. There are delusions and illusions not only in the spiritual but also in the mental and material world, like the mirage in the desert, and the hearing of sounds that exist only in the imagination of the hearer; and these illusions in thought as to material things (as, for example, in a blind man's idea of colour or a deaf man's idea of sound) serve to make it plain that there is a difference between a material thing as it really is, and as it may chance to be in some one's mind and thought.

<sup>1</sup> "Theory of Thought and Knowledge," pp. 342-3.

Thought of a thing is knowledge only when the concept in the mind corresponds with the thing as it really is. If a man says he thinks a material object is such and such a thing, or says that he knows it to be such, his thinking it and knowing it are an illusion and a delusion, unless the thing really is what he thinks he knows it to be. If this be true, it cannot be that things material possess no properties and have no being except as the mind gives them such. The thing known, we repeat, is the cause of the knowledge, not the knowledge the cause of the thing known. Matter may be possessed of certain properties, and no man may know anything of these properties; or there may be a partial and incomplete knowledge of them; or there may be knowledge of them that is accurate and complete. The possession of the properties in question is not in any way affected by man's ignorance of them or by his knowledge of them, be it partial or complete. The variable and uncertain factor in the problem of knowledge is not found in the thing known but in the knowledge or lack of knowledge possessed by the mind whose thought is directed towards it.

The function of the mind is not to create the objects of its thought and knowledge, but to interpret—to interpret what other minds have done. It is not the existence of reality but the meaning and significance of the material universe as a whole and in all its parts and indeed of all other objects of knowledge—this is what depends upon mind. The mind of the Maker and the minds of the interpreters of Nature are akin to each other; and so far give meaning and significance to it that we cannot conceive of physical nature having been brought into existence by the Creator but for the presence in the universe of mind to use and enjoy it. But to go beyond this and say, as some theistic idealists do, that matter and its properties are in their ultimate reality nothing but mind, nothing but thought, is, it seems to me, beyond and against the philosophy of common sense and what reason can approve.

"If the external world were resolved merely into actual sensations," says a critic of the idealistic philosophy, "the existence of the sensible things we see and touch would be intermittent and fragmentary, not permanent and complete.

If external matter means only actual sensations, all visible qualities of things must relapse into nonentity whenever they are left in the dark; and thus tangible ones, too, unless a percipient is in contact with every part of them. The external world could not have existed millions of ages before men or other sentient beings began to be conscious of sensations, if this is what is meant by its real existence." Or, will it be said that it had existence in and for the mind of God before finite minds came into existence?

The natural tendency of such philosophy would seem to be away from God—at least so far as they are concerned who have not yet found God—tending to lead men to see in and through matter and its properties, not God, but themselves, their own mind and thought. On this theory mind in its knowledge of matter would be like unto a man looking into a mirror and seeing only himself there, thinking and saying, "The mirror is nothing; it is I—it is all me!"

## 2. *Philosophic and Theistic Realism*

The term realism in philosophy has two distinct meanings: (1) It is the doctrine that generic terms—e.g., matter, animal, man, etc.—represent realities and not mere concepts of the mind. Plato taught that the genus has a real and positive existence antecedent to the individuals which compose it, while Aristotle's idea, more in accord with the universal sentiment of mankind, was that the genus has real existence only in the individuals which compose it. (2) Realism, as opposed to the idealism of Bishop Berkeley and his followers, which teaches that the only *real* existence that can be predicated of anything is the existence which it has in and for conscious, knowing minds, means that the contents of the phenomenal world (material things, individual objects of various kinds) have a real existence in themselves, antecedent to and independent of the apprehension and knowledge of them possessed by the mind. Only by keeping in mind these two different uses of the term realism is it possible to avoid confusion in the interpretation of any sentence where this word appears.

The truth in theistic philosophy seems to us to be with real-

ism, rightly defined, and not with idealism. We can of course know nothing of the universe as a whole, or of anything in it, beyond what the knowing agent by his constitution is capable of discerning. The important question, says Dr. Fisher, is, whether things are known by us as they are, or whether they undergo a metamorphosis, converting them into things unlike themselves, by being brought into contact with the perceiving and thinking subject. It is tantamount to whether our mental constitution is, or is not, an instrument for perceiving truth. The philosophy of idealism is tantamount to a denial of knowledge in the sense in which this term is interpreted and understood by the universal common sense of mankind. The rescue of philosophy from its aberrations, Professor Fisher has truly said, must begin in a full and consistent recognition of the reality of knowledge. Intuitions are the counterpart of realities. The categories are objective; they are modes of existence as well as modes of knowledge. Distinct as mind and nature are, there is such an affinity in the constitution of both and such an adaptation of each to each, that knowledge is not a bare product of subjective activity, but a reflex of reality.<sup>1</sup>

Much clearer and more satisfactory than any statements made by the exponents of philosophic idealism are the following utterances of a former eminent professor of Philosophy, Dr. James McCosh, late President of Princeton University:

"We know the object as existing or having being. This is a necessary conviction, attached to, or rather composing an essential part of, our concrete cognition of every material object presented to us, be it of our own frame or of things external to our frame; whether this hard stone, or this yielding water, or even this vapoury mist of fleeting cloud. We look on each of the objects thus presented to us, in our organism or beyond it, as having an existence, a being, a reality. Every one understands these phrases; they cannot be made simpler or more intelligible by an explanation. We understand them because they express a mental fact which every one

<sup>1</sup> See Fisher's "Grounds of Theistic and Christian Belief," pp. 82-88.

has experienced. We may talk of what we contemplate in sense-perception being nothing but an impression, an appearance, an idea, but we can never be made to give our spontaneous assent to any such statements. However ingenious the arguments which may be adduced in favour of the objects of our sense-perceptions being mere illusions, we find after listening to them and allowing to them all the weight that is possible, that we still look upon bodies as realities the next time they present themselves. The reason is we know them to be realities by a native cognition which can never be overcome."

"There is no way of avoiding the black and blank scepticism created by philosophic idealism," says Dr. McCosh, "except by standing up for the trustworthiness of all our original intuitions and formally maintaining that there is a reality wherever our intuitions declare that there is."

Equally to the point as an expression of the necessity for faith in the objective reality of what we see and hear and handle as a condition of faith in the sincerity and honesty of the Creator are the following utterances of Descartes, the father of modern philosophy:

"Because we perceive, or rather, stimulated by sense, clearly and distinctly apprehend, certain matter extended in length, breadth, and thickness, the various parts of which have different figures and motions, and give rise to the sensations we have of colours, smells, pains, etc., God would, without question, deserve to be regarded as a deceiver if he directly and of himself presented to our mind the idea of this extended matter, or merely caused it to be presented to us by some object which possessed neither extension, figure, nor motion. For we clearly conceive this matter as entirely distinct from God and from ourselves or our mind; and appear even clearly to discern that the idea of it is formed in us on occasion of objects existing out of our minds, to which it is in every respect similar. But, since God cannot deceive us, for this is repugnant to his nature, as has been already remarked, we must unhesitatingly conclude that there exists a certain object, extended in length, breadth, and thickness, and possessing all those properties

which we clearly apprehend to belong to what is extended. And this extended substance is what we call body or matter."

### 3. *Truth in Philosophy Necessary to Truth in Theology*

A true philosophy of the human mind and of the nature of the concepts and knowledge of things attainable by the mind is essential to a true theology concerning God. In every act of knowledge we recognise three things: A perceiver, a thing perceived and a perception. The first represents a person possessed of mind; the second, an object possessed of real existence and attributes capable of being perceived; and the third involves an exercise of the mind which relates the perceiving person and the perceived thing to each other in such manner that if the concept or idea produced in the mind by the act of perception corresponds with the object as it really is, the resultant is knowledge. If the idea does not correspond with the reality, the result is not knowledge, but an illusion, a mental delusion, which is partial or complete in proportion as the act of perception fails to reproduce or represent accurately and fully the thing perceived as it really is. If the mind of the perceiver is not normal, or, if the eye or other medium of perception, or any condition involved in perception, be defective, there will be an idea in the mind, but it will not correspond with the reality and will not be entitled to be called anything more, at best, than imperfect knowledge—and this is true, whether the person perceiving is aware of the imperfection of his knowledge or not. At the foundation of all knowledge, and all faith, whether pertaining to material or spiritual objects, whether it pertains to man or to God as an object of knowledge, is the conviction that things are what they seem to be if they seem to be what they really are.

The fact that there are mental illusions and delusions, and that men may and do often credit these as knowledge, and for a long time, it may be, act upon the assumption that the thing as it is supposed to be is the thing as it really is—this cannot justify the philosophy that makes the mind the maker of the real or the phenomenal world. If the thing known is the cause of the knowledge, and not the knowledge the cause

of the thing known, it is not easy to see how philosophic idealism can be true. Not, therefore, until our idea of God, our interpretation of God, becomes a knowledge of him as he really is, can we be said to have found the one and only living and true God. The conceptions of God held by pilgrims on the multitudinous pathways in life's journey that lead towards him may be marked by manifold illusions and delusions, by misinterpretations and misconceptions—some much nearer to the truth than others,—and all these pathways and pilgrims may be headed, as indeed they are, towards the same goal, and may, happily, ultimately find the God they seek; but if they do, when they do, it will be found that he is the one God, a real God, the only living and true God, whom to know aright is life eternal. A true theology concerning God can be built alone on a true philosophy concerning man's knowledge of him.

While philosophers may be designated more or less consistently as idealists, realists, pragmatists, and the like, many theistic and Christian believers who think philosophically of the problems of religion do not feel inclined to commit themselves to any one of the systems of philosophy designated by these terms. They see in each system that to which they give assent and that to which they object, and are inclined to approve of the statement made by Dr. A. B. D. Alexander, himself a philosopher: "As to the terms, idealism and realism, I should be heartily glad if we might get rid of them altogether; no sane philosophy has ever been exclusively the one or the other." The object of our studies here, however, has not been primarily to argue for any one system of philosophy as opposed to another, but rather to show wherein and how each system, whatever may be the elements of truth or error in it, leads the thinker to an infinite Thinker, to a Being of infinite intelligence as the most satisfactory explanation, if indeed it be not the only possible rational explanation, of the problem of existence.

CHAPTER NINE  
THROUGH REASON TO GOD



## CHAPTER NINE

### THROUGH REASON TO GOD

Theistic Philosophy differs from philosophic Theism only in the point of emphasis. The former consists in beginning, continuing and ending the process of thinking and reasoning on the assumption that the source and end of all thought and reason are found in a personal God. It is thinking things through *with* God rather than *about* God. Philosophic theism, on the other hand, is here employed to convey the idea that all the elements of intellectual philosophy (thought, speculation, reason, logic, argument, etc.) are used to prove not only the fact of the existence of a Divine Being, but also that this Divine Being is a personal Spirit possessed of infinite power, knowledge, goodness, holiness and all other attributes that enter into the idea of an infinitely perfect Being.

"Every minister of religion who ascends a pulpit," says Bishop John J. Tigert, "may assume that the common people before him, the men and the women of unsophisticated intelligence, even though professedly irreligious, are immovable believers in God and their own souls. These, I say, are truths he may assume; truths he is not required to prove. When he enters upon processes of philosophical proof, he commonly weakens his position; for the popular conviction is at once profounder and clearer than the reasons that most men can allege on behalf of it." If this were true of all people, of uncommon people as well as of "common people," there would be no need for arguments such as we are now proposing to present to prove the existence of a God possessed of attributes which together constitute the absolute perfection of personal being. But that the statement referred to cannot apply to all men in the judgment of Bishop Tigert is shown by the fact that it is taken from the early part of a volume on Theism,

in which he proceeds to set forth all the traditional theological and philosophical arguments to establish faith in the existence of a Divine Being.

## I

THE NECESSITY AND VALUE OF REASON IN  
RELIGION

Do we not sometimes find ourselves wondering and asking why God has not revealed himself and his attributes and purposes so plainly to all men as to make it unnecessary to reason about his existence and attributes at all? Why did he not save us the trouble of so much thinking about him? Or, if we are to think and reason, why did he not make our reasoning to be like a simple problem in mathematics, something demonstrable beyond the possibility of a doubt, or of any difference of opinion whatever. And not only thus concerning himself, but more—why did he not make every object of knowledge so plain that we should not have to reason and speculate about anything as to what it is, in which case all men would think exactly alike about everything, and there would be no difference of opinion about anything. Why did he not make his divinely inspired book, the Bible, so simple, clear and plain that there could be no misunderstanding it and no difference of opinion whatever about anything in it? In this case all men would think *exactly alike*, and believe *exactly the same things* about God, the Bible, and all other things—the only difference being, perchance, that intellectual growth might involve necessarily differences in degrees of knowledge.

What a world this would be if everybody thought and believed and knew exactly the same things as everybody else about God and everything else, and we did not have to speculate and reason concerning anything to reach a conclusion—or, if we must reason, everybody would necessarily reach exactly the same conclusion! And thus by following out to its inevitable conclusion the line of thought with which we started, we reach a *reductio ad absurdum* that results in proving to us that if we did not have to think and speculate and

reason about things this life of ours would be such a monotonous, dead-level, non-thinking, non-reasoning, uninteresting, form of existence that we would long to be transported to some world where we could find somebody that differed from us about something, and where our intellectual life could have the fascination of thinking and speculating and reasoning about things, even about God himself, who he is, what he is, and where he is.

### *1. The Place of Reason in Religion*

“Come, let us reason together,” saith the Lord. The reality of the divine existence, according to Professor Calderwood, author of “The Philosophy of the Infinite,” “is a truth so plain that it needs no proof, as it is a truth so high that it admits of none.” Many pages of philosophy and theology would never have been written if the views of all men had been in accord with this statement of the distinguished Scotch philosopher and teacher. But whatever of truth may be involved in the claim that man possesses a divine “instinct” or “intuition” or “innate knowledge” of God that is antecedent to all his thinking and reasoning concerning the existence, the nature and the attributes of the Divine Being, men have found it impossible to study nature and its laws, or life and its conditions, or man and his attributes, and not relate them in a rational way to some Force, or Power, or Person that has been designated as Deity. Nor do theists who discredit and discard the ordinary “Theistic arguments” that have long been used to prove God’s existence fail to furnish evidences, arguments and proofs in abundance whenever they substitute for these time-honoured arguments a method of writing about the Divine Being and his attributes which, though claiming to be different, is quite the equivalent of the arguments discarded by them. Their new method turns out to be nothing more nor less than the presentation of the reasons why we interpret and must interpret the Cause of all things in terms of intelligence, personality and power as the only adequate solution of the problem of finite existence. So, think about God and reason about God and his relation to all existing things, men will

and must, to the end of time. And if man's nature within and his environment without compel him to think and reason concerning the First Cause; and the final end of all things, it must be that there is a conclusion to be reached as the result of his thinking and reasoning. The theist finds the conclusion to be the definite conviction that all things owe their existence to a personal God.

Bishop F. J. McConnell tells us in one of his books about an old-time writer who once found reason to marvel at the universe because it was "established upon the floods and founded upon the seas." The world to him was a wonder of balance,—the dry land resting steadily upon a surface of water! The Psalmist's conception of the world—(if, indeed, that was his conception and not a mere poetic expression)—has passed away, but not his reason for marvelling at the universe. Indeed, our reason for marvelling at the wonders of the universe are infinitely greater than those of the Psalmist. And this is so because our thought has not maintained a standstill steadiness but rather a steadiness of direction in the midst of a sea of changes. The system of Christian beliefs is like a ship which holds to her course and gets ahead in spite of some rolling. The balance of the ship is shown not in never yielding to the waves, but in never capsising, in an inevitable swing back when she has rolled too far to one side. There are discomforts in such travel, but we advance best by letting the ship roll. Better rise and fall with some ocean swells than to have our vessel becalmed and motionless on a dead-level, smooth, waveless and windless sea. Both the pitch and the roll may help us forward. That ship is the best instrument which best gets us ahead. It is thinking, and speculating and reasoning and discussing thoughts and things that alone keeps us moving ahead. If we did not have to think things through and reason about them with wide margins for others to differ with us and from us, it is a question whether life would be worth living. Life is best as it is, as God has made it. It is best that faith should include and not exclude reason and reasoning. Were it otherwise we would not be rational beings.

*2. The Value of Logic in Theistic Argument*

Logic comes from the Greek "Logos," a term of large significance, which includes among its important meanings both "reason" and the "word," which, as a thought-bearer, is the outward and formal expression of reason. Words are vehicles of thought and reason, and when combined and arranged into a formal discourse and argument they constitute a process of "reasoning," and this also is one of the meanings of the Greek "logos." "Reason," "words," "discourse," "argument," "reasoning"—these meanings and uses of the term from which "logic" comes, explain how and why the science of logic may be called a path that leads to God.

Logic is the name given to that branch of mental science that concerns itself with relating thoughts and truths to each other and drawing conclusions in and through a process of reasoning. It was at one time treated as a branch of philosophy which was then divided into psychology, logic, ethics, and metaphysics. While logic is a science in itself—a science of the laws of thought and of reasoning—it is really and truly an instrument employed by the sciences for the discovery of truth and the attainment of knowledge. By analysing the elements, principles and structure of arguments, it enables us to detect errors and avoid fallacies in reasoning and thus to establish conclusions and attain to certitude in all the realms of thought and study where men are seeking truth and knowledge. But the highest use that can be made of logic is to guide man in and through thinking and reasoning to a knowledge of God, to an ever increasing knowledge of him.

Logic is akin to mathematics. Just as when two numbers are added to each other, or multiplied by each other, or subtracted the one from the other, a certain other number is the result, so may two or more statements of truth be related to each other in such a manner that, if two statements called premises be true a third must follow as an inescapable conclusion; or, if three be true, and be correlated to each other, a fourth must follow; and the human mind is so constituted that, if there be no error in the statements made, or in the

way the premises are related to each other, it can no more properly deny the conclusion arrived at than it can deny the results reached by correct mathematical calculations. Well-nigh all the knowledge we possess is based upon results reached by logical reasoning. The reason why the logical conclusions of scientists, philosophers, theologians and others who engage in reasoning, are far from having the acceptance accorded to them which is accorded to mathematically established results, is not because of the untrustworthiness of logic as a science, but because experience proves that the statements of truth in premises and in relations established between premises by those who engage in reasoning are rarely ever absolutely free from error. There are a thousand chances to one that some error, small or great, will creep undetected into the complicated statements involved in argument, and therefore it must be that the trustworthiness of conclusions will be proportioned to the confidence we have, or do not have, in the absolute accuracy of all the statements and processes involved in the reasoning. But, in spite of these limitations upon the trustworthiness of logic, it is involved in all our thinking and reasoning and is at the foundation of well-nigh all our knowledge. Even the knowledge derived from consciousness and from experience involves relating things to each other and drawing conclusions. Intuitive truth alone is independent of logic. The process of reasoning upon which we are now to enter to prove the existence of God involves all the strength and all the weakness that is incident to logic.

There are many lines of thought which, though not begun with a view to leading the mind to God, do nevertheless, as it were by an unconscious and undesigned process of logic, conduct to the conclusion that such a Being must exist. Man sometimes finds himself running on to God when and where he was not looking for him. He constructs premises to prove something else, but when the premises converge, whatever else they are found to have proved or failed to prove, the conclusion reached involves as a necessary implication the existence of a divine personal Being. "The earlier chemists set out to find the philosopher's stone," says Dr. W. J. Moulton,

"but it was never there ; and in the search they found many of the secrets of nature. So the early navigators set out to find the North-West Passage. There was no passage to find, but they discovered a new world. So the earlier hypothesis of God may be said to have been useful in its day, but left behind for us. The difference is that no other hypothesis has been found to take the place of God, and that whilst our spiritual needs are as clamant as ever there is no way of meeting them unless we can find God.

"Moreover, there is much more to be said, even from the logical point of view, for faith in God. We have seen men setting out from very different needs, dependent, moral, intellectual, social, to find some basis for life. Hence they have spoken of God in varying terms. But the God that satisfies the conscience has been found to satisfy also the mind and the heart. The God revealed in Jesus Christ has been found to satisfy human nature as a whole. . . . When a hypothesis framed to explain one set of phenomena was found to explain many other facts which were not at first present to consciousness at all, that is the surest mode of verification known to science. So we claim here that the view of God which unifies life, explains human history, and gives hope for the future, is confirmed by a mass of evidence that becomes more and more impressive the longer it is considered."<sup>1</sup>

## II

### THE GREAT ARGUMENTS OF THEISM

The great arguments by which it is claimed God's existence and personality are proved are usually stated in theological and philosophical terms, but the lines of thought which they cover are not confined to theologians and philosophers, but are the common property of all thinking men. If men think at all—if their thoughts are directed towards the origin, the nature and the end of things—they must think and reason about God's existence and nature. The thoughts of a scientist may be occupied wholly with things as they are, with nature and

<sup>1</sup> "The Certainty of God," p. 103.

its operations and laws; but a philosopher, if he be true to his high calling, must inquire in the causes of things—into their first and final causes, their determining and efficient and formal causes—and in so doing he is compelled to think of God or find some substitute for him which can explain the cause and purpose and end of things. A philosopher must be a theologian, even though his theology be atheism.

There are certain great lines of thought that are the highways of reason along which the minds of men have travelled in their thoughts concerning God ever since thinking and reasoning began. These familiar lines of thought were long ago formulated into rational arguments, and these arguments are an important part of the contents and the history of theism. They are not relied upon in our day as much as they once were to convince men that there is a God and that he is a Being possessed of all the attributes and perfections of personality. But if there ever was any force of truth in them, it must be there still. Certainly the time has not come, and can never come, when the elements of truth which they contain will fail to impress profoundly all candid thinking minds, even though to many they fall short of furnishing the convincing proofs which many others claim for them—or which at least was once claimed for them. The reaction against these traditional arguments has in my judgment gone too far. Surely there is enough truth in them to make a restatement of them, a new statement of them, a desirable thing in a treatise which undertakes to make a more or less general survey of the more popular paths of human thought that lead to God.

#### *I. The Argument of Descartes, the Founder of Modern Philosophy*

“I think, therefore I am” (*Ego cogito, ergo sum*), is a terse sentence, which was coined by Descartes, the founder of modern philosophy, and which perhaps more than any other one sentence may be called the starting point of modern philosophy. An analysis of the contents of this brief utterance reveals four things: (1) “I,” which carries along with it the idea of individuality, personality, and spirituality in the sub-

ject; (2) "think," which carries along with it the idea of life, consciousness, and mind; (3) "therefore," which carries along with it the idea that mind not only is conscious and thinks, but reasons and draws inferences, which implies that the mind is so constituted that by a primary and fundamental law of its being it concludes that if two things be related to each other in such and such a manner a third must follow; (4) "am," which carries along with it the idea that existence is something actual and not merely ideal.

While existence, however, may be inferred with infallible certainty from self-consciousness, yet self-consciousness cannot be inferred from existence—whatsoever thinks therefore exists, but it does not follow that whatsoever exists therefore thinks. Not all existence, therefore, is alike. Self-consciousness and rational existence is differentiated from mere existence. It is, however, with the third member of this quaternion of primary and fundamental facts that we are here and now concerned—that which is involved in the "therefore" of the mind, the reasoning faculty of the soul, what it is, whence it is, and whither it is. If the mind appears to be quiescent and passive and introspective in the act of consciousness, it is only an appearance and not a reality; for the mind is and must be active; even consciousness is an act of the mind by which self is differentiated from not-self. Motion, not rest, is the law and life of mind; and as the mind acts and moves it compares and relates things; it reasons and must reason. If the fact of my very existence comes to me as a result of reason, and is a "therefore" deduced from other facts and premises, then may we say that practically all of our knowledge is dependent upon reason. We wish to inquire what is the answer that reason gives to the question whether or not there be a God; and if there be a God, who and what he is.

The following is Descartes' own statement of the process of thought by which he arrived at the idea of God and the conviction of his existence:

"By the nature of God I understand a Substance infinite, independent, all-knowing, all-powerful, and by which I myself

and every other thing that exists, if any such there be, were created. But these properties are so great and excellent that the more attentively I consider them the less I feel persuaded that the idea I have of them owes its origin to myself alone. And thus it is absolutely necessary to conclude, from all that I have before said, that God exists; for though the idea of substance be in my mind owing to this, that I myself am a substance, I should not, however, have the idea of an infinite substance, seeing I am a finite being, unless it were given me by some substance in reality infinite. And I must not imagine that I do not apprehend the infinite by a true idea, but only by the negation of the finite, in the same way that I comprehend repose and darkness by the negation of motion and light; since, on the contrary, I clearly perceive that there is more reality in the infinite substance than in the finite, and therefore that in some way I possess the perception of the infinite before that of the finite—that is, the perception of God before that of myself, for how could I know that I doubt, desire, or that something is wanting to me, and that I am not wholly perfect, if I possessed no idea of a being more perfect than myself, by comparison of which I knew the deficiencies of my nature.”<sup>1</sup>

## 2. *The Ontological Argument*

The argument of Descartes is sometimes designated as the “anthropological” argument, but it is generally treated as a form of what is known as the ontological argument. The significant word, “ontology,” which furnishes the name of this argument, is derived from two Greek words, *on*, *ontos*, the present participle or noun derived from *einai*, the verb “to be,” and *logos*, which means the word, the expressed thought, the doctrine, reason, cause, ground, argument. An ontological argument, then, is, if it be true to its name, an argument based upon and derived from the nature of being or the fact of existence. The first postulate of reason is, as we have seen, that which infers self-existence from self-consciousness. But as the act of self-consciousness involves a distinction between self and not-self, the mind does not stop with inferences about self, but begins at once and inevitably

<sup>1</sup> “*Meditations*,” III, p. 21.

to reason about that other implication of consciousness, the "not-self."

The first postulate of reason that points in the direction of Deity is drawn from the fact of existence thus: Something exists, therefore something must always have existed. *Ex nihilo nihil fit*—Out of nothing nothing comes. If there ever was a time when absolutely nothing existed, then it is absolutely impossible that anything could ever have come into existence. Time always has been and space always has been, but these two concepts, time and space, are not so much things existing as they are necessary conditions of existence. So far as the mere mental act is concerned we can conceive of absolute nonentity, that is, of everything that now exists being non-existent; for, if we can think out of existence this and that individual thing, we can think all things out of existence—but we cannot think away time and space.

Whatever is uncaused and eternal exists necessarily. This applies to three things—viz.: time, space, and some being. Time had no beginning, and can have no end. Space had no beginning, and has and can have no boundaries beyond which it does not extend. But while I can, as a mere matter of thought, conceive of the non-existence of this thing, of many things, and of all existing things, it is at the same time true that, now that something actually exists, I cannot conceive that the time ever was when absolutely nothing existed and something spontaneously came into existence out of time and space. Reason, then, demands that we believe that, as something now exists, therefore something has existed from eternity. This proves that an eternal Being of some kind, an eternal Something, from which all things now existing have come, has always existed.

Seeing that something now exists, there is no truth more evident to the human mind than that something must have existed from eternity. "The human mind immediately rejects as a self-evident absurdity the proposition that this universe, or anything, could have originated from nothing. The infinite God is needed as much to explain the existence of an atom, or of a dewdrop, as he is to explain the existence of a sun

or a system of worlds." Give me but one grain of sand, said Cousin, and I will prove that there is a God!

The ontological argument in its traditional form differs from what we have here given, and may be stated thus:—We have the idea of an absolutely perfect Being. An essential element of absolute perfection is existence. To affirm that an absolutely perfect Being who actually exists is greater, more perfect, than such a Being that exists only in idea, is self-evident. A perfect Being then that exists only in idea and not in reality is not absolutely perfect—is far from perfect, in that he would lack a most essential quality of perfection, namely, actual existence. Actual existence, therefore, it is argued, is involved in the very idea of an absolutely perfect Being; or, to state the same thought differently, a perfect Being which exists in mind carries along with it as a necessary inference the actual existence of such a Being. This was the claim of Anselm and other philosophers and theologians of like mind. The correctness of this inference, however, is by no means self-evident, and the argument in this form is considered of no value by many who yet believe in the existence of such a perfect Being. This argument grew out of Descartes' philosophy, among the primary and fundamental postulates of which was not only *Ego cogito, ergo sum*, "I think, therefore I am," but also *Deus cogitatus est, ergo Deus est*, "God is thought (that is, is an object of thought), therefore God is." This last, however, is by no means self-evident like the former, and cannot, therefore, be relied upon as an argument to prove the existence of God. But to say that inasmuch as something now exists therefore something must always have existed is a statement of the ontological argument which is absolutely undeniable. And that "Something" which is back of all other things we are fully justified in calling divine Being.

"If there were no God," says Ralph Cudworth in his "Intellectual System of the Universe," endorsing the position both of Descartes and of Anselm, "the idea of an absolutely or infinitely perfect Being could never have been made or feigned, neither by politicians nor by poets, nor by philosophers, nor any others."

Now it will be noted that we have presented the ontological argument here in three different forms, which we now name in the reverse order in which we have given them.

(1) In its Anselmic form, as an inference drawn from the *idea* of a *perfect* Being in the *mind* that such a Being must actually exist. (2) In its Cartesian form, as an inference drawn from the *idea of God* in the mind that such a *super-human* idea could only have come into the mind of man by God himself placing it there. In neither of these forms do we count the argument at all conclusive. (3) But, in the third form in which we have presented it, it is unanswerable in proving all that it claims to prove, namely, that Something has existed from all eternity. This third form of the argument justifies itself in the etymology of the word, being an argument from "being" (which is the meaning of the Greek *on*, *ontos*, participle of *einai*, "to be"). From the fact that Something now *exists* the conclusion is irresistible that *Something* must always have existed. If it be claimed that the argument as thus stated, being an argument from "effect" back to "cause," invades the province and purpose of the argument (Cosmological) which comes next in order, the statement will not be denied, except to the extent of saying that each of these successive arguments includes within itself all of the argument that goes before it. Each argument, however, advances much beyond what its predecessor proves—as, for example, the essence of the cosmological argument is included in the larger and more comprehensive "teleological" argument up to which it leads, and the essential truth of this argument in turn is involved in the still higher and better "moral" argument up to which it logically leads.

But the important thing to note is that, whatever form this argument takes in making its appeal to different minds, it is to all alike a path that leads to God.

### 3. *The Cosmological Argument*

Two Greek words, *kosmos* (from *kosmeo*, to arrange, or put in orderly form) and *aetiology* (an inquiry into the causes of things), have both been used by philosophers in their efforts

to find an appropriate name for another of the great theistic arguments that are employed to prove the existence of a Divine Being whose intelligence and power are sufficient to account for things as they are. From a careful consideration of the orderly arrangement of the universe, both as a whole and in all its parts, and a recognition of the fact that nothing happens in this universe of being that is not related to something antecedent to it as a cause and something following it as an effect, comes what is known as the Cosmological or *Ætiological* argument for God's existence.

The entire universe, as far as we know it, is under the reign of a uniform and everywhere prevalent law of cause and effect. The conviction that every effect must have a cause, and that the cause must always be adequate to account for the effect, is one of the deepest and most fundamental convictions of the human mind. It matters not whether this conviction is an intuitive truth—that is, a primary and fundamental idea of the mind, not derived from experience and reason—or whether it is a conviction arrived at by experience and by a process of reasoning, the conviction itself is universal, and all human thinking is based on the assumption of its truth. To say that every change must have a cause is virtually the same as to say that every effect must have a cause, inasmuch as effects are always changes. The world and the entire range of human life abound in changes and effects.

The entire universe of which our world is a part is believed to be, both as a whole and in all its parts, a series of changes and effects that can be accounted for in only one of two ways:—either the present series of causes and effects has been going on forever without any beginning and is intrinsically automatic, or else all things had their determining and originating cause at some definite past time in the free will of a Being whose power to create and preserve and govern all things constitutes an entirely adequate cause and explanation of the universe. The latter alternative is generally regarded as by far the more rational of the two. But in either case the existence of an Eternal Cause of things follows as a necessary deduction of reason. Whether there be a personal God or

not has not been settled by this argument, but we have proved two things: first, that there is an Eternal Being; and, secondly, this Eternal Being has possessed from eternity power sufficient to be an adequate Cause of all things as they now exist. If matter and its properties, or matter and force, be found sufficient to account for everything that is known to exist—as some people profess to believe is the case—then all that this argument has done for us is to lead us to materialism and make it fitting that we should at least so far deify Matter and Force as to spell them with capital letters, while waiting to see if further arguments will not compel us to pass from materialism to theism.

#### 4. *The Teleological Argument*

We are now ready to go a step further and affirm that the human mind is so constituted that it must believe not only that every effect must have a cause, but that whatever is in the effect must be in the cause, either actually or potentially present. This is known as the "teleological" argument—from the two Greek words, *telos*, end or design, and *logos*, reason. If it is impossible that something should come into existence out of nothing, then is it equally impossible that there should be in the effect, anything greater than the cause. If the effect shows evidences of mind, then there must be mind in the cause. If there is life, consciousness, personality, spirituality, free will, conscience in the effect, then these things must be, at least potentially, in the producing cause. Supposing there was once a time when there was nothing but matter (star dust, for example) in existence, is it conceivable that life and mind and free will could come spontaneously into existence out of matter as we now know it? Human reason answers, No—so, at least, unless matter or star dust had life germs and "mind stuff" and volitional energy in it from all eternity.

Whatever is evolved from matter must have been always involved in matter; but our very idea and definition of matter involves a radical and essential distinction between mind and matter. They belong to totally different orders of being. Even if matter, as we know it, were supposed to be eternal, it could

not, even with eternity at its command, originate mind and spirit, free will and conscience. Matter cannot create and originate anything. Mind and spirit can create and originate some things—ideas, volitions, motion. And we know by experience that mind can influence and control matter. Indeed, a large part of the life and activity of mind or spirit consists in its domination over and control of matter, including the vegetable and animal world.

We know what inorganic and inert matter is in itself alone; and we know what the same matter is when brought under the control of mind. It is the difference between mere sand and clay and water and minerals as they exist in nature, and these same materials when put into the form of houses and churches and schools and factories and machinery and engines and clocks and watches. Indeed, one of the best evidences and manifestations of mind is that which is thus found in matter that has been brought under the control and arrangement of mind.

The world about us in its arrangements and adjustments reveals the unmistakable signs of mind. The relation of the earth on which we live to the sun, its revolution around the sun, and its rotation upon its own axis, the atmosphere, the distribution of land and water, the adaptation of the soil to vegetable life and of vegetable life to sustain animal life, and lower animal life to minister to that which is higher—these are but a few of the many instances of that widespread adaptation of one thing to another, of the lower to the higher, that reigns throughout the material, vegetable, and animal world, and bears every mark of the presence and influence of a designing mind upon matter—a mind that must be either in matter itself, or outside of the matter which gives evidence of being controlled by intelligence.

Besides and above this, here are living beings that have personality, consciousness, spirituality, free will, moral natures, consciences. Whence came these things? Certainly not from matter as we know it. We are thus compelled by reason to search for an adequate Cause for these things; and only a Cause which itself possesses life, personality, spirituality, mind,

free will, a moral nature, can possibly originate beings having these attributes, or could so create, arrange and control the physical, vegetable, and animal world as to make them exhibit as they do the infallible signs of an all-controlling Intelligence in their adjustment and adaptation to each other.

Rational beings always act with reference to an end. What is last in realisation is first in mind, and hence is the cause of all that is done. The presence of design,—that is, the evidence that things have been planned and performed with reference to a certain end—is an unfailing sign of mind. The world is full of evidences of design, and therefore of proof that the Power that has made existing things what they are is a rational Being whose mind is revealed in the laws of nature and in all the marvellous adaptations and adjustments to each other that are found in the mineral, vegetable, and animal kingdoms. Some of these we have already presented in detail in previous chapters where they were introduced as proofs of a designing Mind reigning in and over our world.

Kant, although he did not himself think the teleological argument was as conclusive a proof of the existence and wisdom of God as was claimed for it, has given a most satisfactory statement of its contents :

“(1) There are everywhere in the world clear indications of an intentional arrangement carried out with great wisdom and forming a whole indescribably varied in its contents and infinite in extent. (2) The fitness of this arrangement is entirely foreign to the things existing in the world, and belongs to them contingently only, that is, the nature of different things could never spontaneously, by the combination of so many means, co-operate toward definite aims, if these means had not been selected and arranged on purpose by a rational disposing principle, according to certain fundamental ideas; (3) there exists, therefore, a sublime and wise cause (or many), which must be the cause of the world, not only as a blind and all-powerful nature, by means of unconscious fecundity, but as an intelligence, by *freedom*; (4) the unity of that cause may be inferred with certainty from the unity of the reciprocal relations of the parts of the world, as portions of a skilful

edifice, so far as our experience reaches, and beyond it, with plausibility, according to the principles of analogy.”<sup>1</sup>

Kant is frequently represented as “rejecting” this argument as invalid. This is not a true statement of his attitude towards it, as shown by his reference to it in the following language: “Although we have nothing to say against the reasonableness and utility of this line of argument, but wish, on the contrary, to commend and encourage it, we cannot approve of the claims which are made for it, that it reaches apodictic certainty, nor can we approve of its merits as being so great that it requires no favours and needs no help from any other quarter.” Of the argument itself he says:

“It is the oldest, the clearest and most in conformity with human reason. It gives life to the study of nature, deriving its own existence from it, and thus constantly acquiring new vigour. It reveals aims and intention where our own observation would not by itself have discovered them, and enlarges our knowledge of nature by leading us toward that peculiar unity the principle of which exists outside nature. This knowledge reacts again on its cause—namely, the transcendental idea—and thus increases the belief in a supreme Author to an irresistible conviction. It would, therefore, be not only extremely sad, but utterly vain, to attempt to diminish the authority of that proof. Reason, constantly strengthened by the powerful arguments that come to hand by themselves (though they are no doubt empirical only), cannot be discouraged by any doubts of subtle and abstract speculation. Roused from every inquisitive indecision, as from a dream, by one glance at the wonders of nature and the majesty of the cosmos, reason soars from height to height till it reaches the highest; from the conditioned to conditions, till it reaches the supreme and unconditioned Author of all.”<sup>2</sup>

“The more I study nature,” says Mr. Darwin, “the more I become impressed with ever-increasing force with the conclusion that the contrivances and beautiful adaptations slowly acquired through each part occasionally varying in a slight de-

<sup>1</sup> “Critique of Pure Reason,” Müller’s translation, II, 536, 537.  
<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 534-536.

gree but in many ways, with the preservation or natural selection of those variations which are beneficial to the organism under the complex and ever-varying conditions of life, *transcend in an incomparable degree the contrivances and adaptations which the most fertile imagination of the most imaginative man could suggest with unlimited time at his disposal.*" This means either one of two things—"mind-stuff" in matter or Mind back of and over matter—of which two alternatives the latter is surely the more rational.

"Matter as an unformed mass existing without relation of parts," Dr. Thomas Chalmers declares in his "Natural Theology," "would not of itself have suggested the notion of a Creator. In the mere existence of an unshapen and unorganised mass we see nothing that indicates the non-eternity of matter or its derivation from an antecedent mind." He thinks it well, therefore, that revelation has resolved for us the otherwise insoluble mystery and given us distinctly to understand that to the fiat of a great Eternal Spirit matter stands indebted for its existence and its laws, as well as for its numerous collocations of use and convenience. He thus held that without a revealed theology we should not have known of the creation of matter out of nothing, and that from the useful dispositions of its parts alone is the need of an intelligent Author to be inferred. "The one impresses the understanding just as differently from the other as a stone of random form lying upon the ground impresses the observer differently from a watch. The mere existence of matter in itself indicates nothing. It is the combinations of matter and its organic structures which alone speak to us of a Divinity—just as it is not the clay, but the shape into which it has been moulded, that announces the impress of a Designer's hand."

We are inclined to think that if Dr. Chalmers could have seen what he calls "unshapen and unorganised matter" "existing as an unformed mass without relation of parts," under a modern microscope—if he could have known of the marvellous revelations of radium in the study of molecules and atoms which has been made possible by modern science—he would have been compelled to so far revise his idea of "matter as an unformed

and unshaped mass" as to see in it as a "manufactured" article such order and adjustment of part to part, of atom to atom and element to element, as calls for "its derivation from an antecedent Mind."

### 5. *The Moral Argument*

Man's nature furnishes in conscience a sure evidence that it came from and is akin to a moral God. The most significant and momentous decisions of the human will are not those which concern matters that are purely intellectual or merely emotional. It is when the decision of the human will involves a matter of right and wrong, involves moral responsibility, and is followed by moral consequences, that it takes on its highest significance. It is in the presence within man of what we call conscience, the moral consciousness that has to do primarily with the right and wrong of free volitions and acts, that we find that argument for the existence of God which many regard as the most convincing of all arguments. What makes one thing right and another thing wrong? And how did conscience get in us, and come to have such an authoritative voice in commanding us to do one thing and not to do another—a voice none the less authoritative because it may be and often is disobeyed? What is the ultimate source of ethics? Is it in matter? Is it in social environment? And if it be recognised that social environment and custom have much to do with determining what in any given case is regarded as right or wrong, does it follow that this is the origin of ethics and of the distinction between right and wrong? Or will a careful and scientific search for an adequate cause and explanation of moral distinctions and moral law in the world, and of conscience within man, drive us to a moral God as the only rational explanation of the origin of moral creatures and of the moral world in which they live? This can be the only answer to the why of right and wrong that can satisfy the reason of rational beings.

Neither materialism nor pantheism can furnish any satisfactory explanation of the origin of ethics and conscience nor any but a fickle foundation for obedience to what may be rec-

ognised as moral law. "I shall discuss human actions," said Spinoza, the father of modern pantheism, "just as I do human appetites, and both actions and appetites just as if it were a question of lines, planes or solids." But human conduct, it must be answered, is not a matter of lines, planes and solids; and motives cannot be thus measured on a quantitative scale. The satisfaction which a noble soul finds in doing his duty,—and this at the sacrifice of physical good, and it may be, even at the cost of life itself—is not to be compared with any satisfaction of appetites. The peace of the saints in the love of God is not to be expressed in words of physical satiety.<sup>1</sup>

It is in the predominant choice of one kind of pleasure over a different kind of pleasure that character is revealed. General Robert E. Lee, after the close of the Civil War, declined a salary of a hundred thousand dollars offered him if he would consent to be president of a commercial organisation; but he chose instead to be president of a college where he could teach Southern boys, and this he did on a salary of only twelve hundred dollars a year. In declining to allow his devotion to the South and the esteem in which he was held to be commercialised either in his own behalf or by others for their financial gain he revealed the moral greatness of his character. Professor Agassiz of Harvard declined large sums of money offered him if he would go out on a money-making tour of lectures, saying that he was too busy with his important work as a scientist and a teacher to turn aside to making money. When materialists and pantheists undertake to treat great moral volitions and acts like these as they treat physical appetites and to measure them as they do lines and planes and solids, they show their own moral impotence in trying to account for and explain morals without a moral God. Conscience with its categorical imperative, "thou must," and the moral law with its inescapable sanctions, are witnesses to the existence of a universal moral government that absolutely demands a supreme moral Governor whose eternal, uncreated moral nature expresses and reveals itself in moral creatures and moral law—and conscience.

<sup>1</sup> See Smyth's "Christian Ethics," p. 39.

Religion and ethics are so related that, if each is what it ought to be, they not only may but must serve each other. As to which is to be regarded as the more important, this is a question that depends on what is in mind as the point of emphasis. If religion is thought of as the recognition and worship of God, then it takes precedence over ethics, seeing that, so defined, it is the foundation and inspiration of ethics. If ethics be viewed as the right regulation of conduct and the attainment of the highest ideal of moral character in individuals and nations, and religion be regarded as one of the many forces working for these ends, then ethics is the greater, the end, and religion a means subservient to the end. That religion ministers in many ways to a higher and finer ethics, and that ethics enters into and ministers continually to religion, are among the axiomatic truths of Christianity. Religion devoid of ethical ideals and contents of a high order is a force that works for evil in proportion to the moral baseness of its ideals, and may be worse than no religion at all. But a religion that is infused with lofty ethical ideals is the greatest power for good known to man; for such a religion finds its culmination and crown, its end and earthly goal, in that ethical manhood and womanhood to produce which is the one great purpose for which the kingdom of God exists in the earth. When the religions of the world are judged by this standard, the one which furnishes above all others this ethical credential of its superiority, simply asks that those who are seeking evidence and sitting in judgment will read the history of civilisation and of human progress and find the men and nations that have believed it and lived out its ethical ideals, and it will have no fear as to the verdict. In the ethical life and ethical teachings of Jesus Christ is found the moral dynamic of the Christian religion; and Christianity furnishes the one and only dynamic that is equal to the world's moral needs.

The science of Christian ethics is built on the moral character of God. The following propositions are its fundamental principles: (1) God's eternal, uncreated nature is the ultimate source of all moral good, and the origin of that which makes right to be right, and the opposite of right to be wrong. (2)

The will of God whenever and wherever revealed is the expression of his moral nature. (3) Christ, the Son of God, is the perfect expression in personality and life of both the nature and the will of God. (4) The Bible is the best expression in all literature of the mind and will of God. The revelation of God's will in the Old Testament is partial and imperfect but progressive in its approach to an accurate interpretation and expression of the mind and will of God, while the New Testament, in so far as it perfectly reproduces and records the mind and words and acts of Christ, is a perfect revelation of the nature and will of God. (5) The Bible teaches ethical principles rather than ethical rules, rules being the interpretation and adaptation of ethical principles to specific but more or less mutable conditions—principles remaining ever the same while the rules that interpret and adapt them to conditions may and do change.

But what we have to go by in ethics in the last analysis, is not God's nature and will, or Christ and the Bible as they really are, but man's *interpretation* of God, of Christ, and the Bible; and this is a resultant and expression of the common Christian consciousness, that is, of "all the knowledge and experience which Christian believers have gained of Christ, and which consciousness becomes in its turn a kind of law to the Scriptures—the law of their interpretation, of their criticism and of their verification." The Christian consciousness as thus defined and appraised becomes, then, for the body of believers at any given time and in any given land, the accepted arbiter and determiner of who and what God is, and of what standard of right is to be applied to human conduct. What God is, is one thing; and what men think him to be, is another. The latter is what God really is to any generation, be the interpretation true or false. Every reinterpretation of God is, or ought to be, a more perfect interpretation than that which preceded it. The attainment of perfect ethical manhood waits on the perfect interpretation of God; and this ethical goal is in a sense the end and aim of the revelation of God in Christ; "Till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto

the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." God's great work is making men; perfect men are his crown and glory. In proportion to the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the knowledge of God possessed by men and to the fidelity with which their lives and characters are made to conform to this knowledge, do men attain to the divine ideal.

However vital God's relation to physical nature is, his relation to human nature is even more vital. And God does his work in this realm of human nature in and through man, and not only in and through individuals, and by occasional interventions, but he works in and through men collectively, in and through nations, and the entire race, and not for a day only but all the time. God's government of physical nature is expressed in the uniformity of nature's laws; and the perfect adaptation of these laws to each other gives unity to nature. God's government of human nature, of men individually and collectively, is through the free agency and self-determining power of each individual. But, in spite of the variety and independence which this seems to give, there is an organic unity in human nature which makes the whole race one; and the history of the human race properly studied and interpreted proves that—to use Matthew Arnold's familiar phrase—"there is a Power not ourselves that makes for righteousness." It is because this "Power" that makes for righteousness is rational and moral and personal, that in the course of centuries there can be seen a moral philosophy of history. The ultimate moral goal of humanity, the far-off divine event towards which, in the purpose of God, the whole creation tends, comprehends in its scope the entire human race and covers all time. Only in the progressive realisation of a divine purpose and an ethical end like this can we find a moral argument altogether worthy of God.

#### 6. *Consensus Gentium*

There is an additional argument for believing in the existence of God which, unlike all others, may yet be said to include and reinforce all other arguments in that it finds in the uni-

versality of faith in the existence of some kind of deity a profound reason for believing that a universal and abiding conviction of the entire race cannot be a delusion and deceit. *Semper, ab omnibus, ubique*—what has been believed always, by everybody, everywhere, can be a false faith only on the assumption that the human race is so constituted as to be by nature subject to delusion in the greatest and most important of all matters of faith. Such a bill of indictment against the entire human race only a few have been daring enough to make—and even those who have discovered for themselves that there is no God, and that all who believe in such a Being are mistaken and deluded, as a rule betray, in their attempts to explain the problem and mysteries of existence, the fact that they have really disguised rather than denied God. For whatever may be the Force, or Energy, or Power, that has to be predicated, in order to explain and account for things, it is simply “God in disguise.” John Fiske, it will be remembered, not only believed in the truth of this universal conviction of the human race, but found in its universality and persistence and truth his greatest argument for evolution, which means the adaptation of all life to environment, to an environment of real not imaginary and unreal things. He believed that the universal out-going after God which has always characterised the human race, is the outgoing after a real and not an imaginary Being. Whether John Fiske’s use of the universality of man’s faith in God be justified or not, there can be no doubt of the force of the inference drawn from “consensus gentium,” that a faith so old, so extensive, so intensive, so dominating, as is the faith of the human race in God, must have at its base a great Reality.

And after furnishing all these arguments in proof of the existence of God and claiming for them varying degrees of validity and strength, we must yet concede that no one of them, indeed that not all of them put together, can furnish proof so convincing as to be intellectually compelling. “We have no proof of the existence of God,” says Bishop McConnell,

"which will make any one believe, whether or no, without a venture of faith. Kant once said that the wisdom of the Almighty had been shown quite as much in what had been withheld from us as in what had been revealed. We shall get on best by conceding the limitations of our mental instruments."

In apparent keeping with this thought, Tennyson makes "The Ancient Sage" to say:

Thou canst not prove that thou art body alone,  
Nor canst thou prove that thou art spirit alone,  
Nor canst thou prove that thou art both in one;  
For nothing worthy proving can be proven,  
Nor yet disproven.

So writes the great poet laureate, but who can read his "In Memoriam" without feeling that whether we call his thoughts concerning God and Christ "proofs" or not, the intellectual process by which he reaches a conclusion may well be titled "Through Reason to God," and justify us in "believing where we cannot prove." And does not his "Higher Pantheism" give strong reason for believing in God? Thus:

The sun, the moon, the stars, the seas, the hills and the plains,  
Are not these, O soul, the vision of Him that reigns?  
Law is God, say some; no God at all, says the fool;  
For all we have power to see is a straight staff bent in a pool.  
God is law, say the wise; O soul, and let us rejoice,  
For if He thunder by law, the thunder is yet His voice.

CHAPTER TEN  
THROUGH THE BIBLE TO GOD



## CHAPTER TEN

### THROUGH THE BIBLE TO GOD

The Bible opens with a majestic sentence, the moral grandeur of which not even inspiration could easily surpass: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." The Bible is pre-eminently "God's Book"—it begins, continues, and ends with God. It is *a Deo, de Deo, in Deum*—it is from God, concerning God, and leads to God. The reason why it more than any other book leads to God is because it more truly than any other book is from God and concerning God. We wish to consider some of those characteristics of the Bible that have made it the world's best guide-book to God. It is the Bible doctrine of God which more than anything else has made it the supreme handbook of theism for the world. We believe that God has spoken to man in and through the Bible as he has not in and through any other book; but if it were nothing more than is claimed for it by many students of comparative religion—simply one among many books of natural religion—it must still be recognised as *primus inter pares*, the first among its equals. How can we explain this fact of its primacy in the religious literature of the world?

The greatest possible service that a divinely inspired volume can render to men is to give them what history proves nature and reason cannot supply, namely, an altogether worthy and satisfying conception of God and proper guidance in rightly relating themselves to him. And the greatest possible proof that a volume can furnish of its being divinely inspired is for it to contain and set forth a doctrine of God that is so high and exalted that the human mind can conceive of and desire nothing that is higher and more perfect. Our special interest in the doctrine of Biblical inspiration, so far

as these present studies are concerned, is connected with the doctrine of God. We desire to examine the Scriptures with reference to what they teach concerning God, his nature, character and attributes. The study of the Biblical revelation contained in this chapter will present a general survey of the Scripture teachings concerning God without any reference to critical questions which may come up for consideration in later chapters.

If ever the divine has appeared in literature, it is certainly, as every person of thought and intelligence must admit, in that collection of writings which we designate as the Christian Scriptures, especially the New Testament. Never before in the history of the world has the Bible had so many readers, and never before has it had such influence in the world, as it has to-day. And yet never before have traditional opinions concerning it been subjected to scrutiny and criticism to such an extent as of late. Some have thought that the modification or abandonment of traditional views concerning the Bible, which has taken place under recent critical study on the part of many, indicates an abandonment of faith in the Bible as a divinely inspired and authoritative book. But this inference is unwarranted. Faith in a given view of Biblical inspiration is not to be confounded with faith in the Bible itself. To deny this or that view of inspiration is not the same as denying the fact of divine inspiration.

Let us now see how the doctrine of Deity runs like a thread of gold through all types of Biblical literature, sometimes obscure and hidden indeed beneath the surface, but never lost—and then again coming to the surface and finding glorious expression in language that is in every way befitting a divine revelation given by inspiration of God. "The Bible," says Dr. Lyman Abbott, "is a guide to revelation, not a substitute for it. Only as we so use the Bible that we stop not at the Book, but go through the Book to the God who gave it forth, are we worthy to be prophets and preachers of this twentieth century."

We wish here and now to survey the Bible in a general way and see what, in its main outlines, is the conception of God that

is progressively unfolded in its successive and varied types of literature.

## I

### THE OLD TESTAMENT REVELATION OF GOD

There are five general types of literature found in the Old Testament and each of these bears its lofty testimony to the greatness, the holiness and the goodness of God. History, poetry, prophecy, wisdom literature, and apocalyptic literature—all find a place in the Old Testament. These various types of literature are to be distinguished from each other; but the different books of the Old Testament cannot be separated and distributed according to this classification with any degree of accuracy, seeing that some books embody two or three, or even four, types of literature.

#### 1. *God in the Pentateuch*

The most venerated portion of the Old Testament, that variously designated as the Pentateuch, or the Law, or the books of Moses, is mainly historical; but it also contains poetry and prophecy. The book of Genesis, no matter when or by whom it was written, is a most remarkable literary production, and is in every way worthy of the place which it occupies at the beginning of the inspired volume. Considering the early date of the events which it describes, and the length of time which its history covers, the high character of its ethics as compared with the heathen nations around them, and its lofty spiritual conception of God, it is not easy to see how such a work could have been produced except by the aid of divine inspiration. No one can read the books of the Pentateuch without discerning here and there in the majestic words and the profound interpretations of events which they contain the presence and voice of God. Only one who has attained to a high and comforting conception of God could write words like these, found in the Pentateuch:—"The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms."

After all possible allowance has been made for the human element in these early narratives, there still remains an element so transcendent, so much above the power of man to invent or create, that it can only be explained as the self-revelation of God—a revelation, however, made to and through men who, it must be recognised, were subject to and conditioned by the intellectual and moral limitations of the early age in which they lived. God's revelations of himself to Noah, to Abraham, to Jacob and Joseph and Moses, if studied as the earlier stages of a progressive revelation, have a permanent value even though they fall far short of the revelations of himself made to men in and through Christ. The moral value of the Ten Commandments in the revelation which they make of God is the richest asset in the religion of the ancient world. Commands imply a commander, and these Commandments are inexplicable without a divine Commander. They are the voice of God not only to Israel in the wilderness of Sinai, but to all men of whatever age or nation who would seek a better and a heavenly country, a city that hath foundations whose maker and builder is God. Even admitting that these Pentateuchal books were given their present form at a later date, and that some later conceptions of religion are found in them, it is not easy to overestimate their value in the history of religion, especially in their contribution to the progressive revelation of God which moved ever onward and upward to, and finally culminated in, our Lord Jesus Christ, who, as God incarnate, interpreted God in terms of Fatherhood and love.

## *2. God in Hebrew History*

The purpose of Old Testament history was not, we may say, to make a complete and infallible record of all historical facts, but rather to present a divine philosophy of history; to interpret events in a religious way and to explain from the divine side certain important facts of history that were especially valuable for the moral lessons they served to teach; to point out the evils of sin and the blessings of righteousness; to bring to light God's hand in human history and show that he is not a silent spectator of human affairs but the

supreme moral Governor of the universe to whom individuals and nations alike owe allegiance. That the Biblical history is more accurate and trustworthy than any other ancient history can easily be shown; but this is not the all-important point that differentiates the Biblical narratives from all other histories. That differentiating point is to be found in the everywhere-present and all-dominating moral purpose that runs through the Biblical history—a feature entirely lacking, for example, in the histories of Greece and Rome. The fact that God has left it absolutely unknown when or by whom a large portion of the Bible records were written warns us against attaching too great importance to questions of this kind. Inspiration shows itself in the realm of history not so much in making an absolutely accurate and infallible record of facts as in teaching infallible and useful moral lessons from the facts recorded. In Bible history, then, as in no other historical writings, we can trace God's hand in the history of our race. As we journey along the pathway of Old Testament history, we are never out of sight of God. Whether the reader may or may not be disposed to agree with the writer in the way in which he relates God to passing events, there is no mistaking the fact that the omnipresent and ever-active God is there, not only looking on but taking an active part in whatever transpires.

### *3. God in the Prophetic and Apocalyptic Writings*

That the prophets were inspired and spoke with divine authority is a truth which no one will doubt who believes that inspiration and divine authority are to be found anywhere in the Bible. That "the word of the Lord came unto them" is proved not more by the fact that they said it did than by what they say. Such true conceptions of the character and attributes of God, of sin and man's need of moral renovation by divine power, such denunciations of wickedness of all kinds, such Godlike exhortations to righteousness, such spiritual conceptions of God's kingdom, such moral courage in delivering their messages in the face of persecution and martyrdom, such visions of the coming Messiah—if these characteristics

of the prophets do not prove that God talked to them and communed with them, and sent them to declare his will, then nothing could prove it. The messages of such prophets, though primarily addressed to Israel and Judah, become, when properly interpreted, messages of righteousness and truth to all nations for all time, revealing Jehovah in all the greatness of his character as the God of all men everywhere.

The Apocalyptic writings combine history and prophecy; they are prophetic and symbolic visions of the future expressed in terms of history, interpreted from the point of view of God's part in the making of it. The book of Revelation in the New Testament, and certain portions of Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah in the Old Testament, may be named as the most notable examples of apocalyptic literature. The symbolic visions of the future found in these writings are based on faith in the all-controlling sovereignty of God, who not only has in his hands the destiny of individuals, but the rise and fall of empires as well. The destiny of nations no less than of individuals is determined in God's righteous government by moral character.

"Apocalyptic was really a sort of Jewish philosophy of religion, an attempt to reveal the future purpose of God for the world with a view to the establishment of faith in difficult days," says Dr. J. Y. Simpson. "It may be said that the writers of Apocalyptic books were 'Catastrophists' as opposed to the older 'Uniformitarians' (the prophets) who, on the whole, looked for a gradual moral reformation in the life of the nation, although some of them (as, for example, Amos and Isaiah) were not forgetful of 'the day of the Lord.' To the Apocalyptic mind things had gone too far; the world was too evil to be the possible subject of moral change. Nothing short of a complete ending of the present dispensation and the commencement of a new age visibly inaugurated by God himself would be of any avail. But the Apocalyptic was more supermundane in his ideas of the Messianic Kingdom than the Old Testament prophet. He tended, on the

whole, to push the consummation more and more into the future.”<sup>1</sup>

#### 4. *God in the Wisdom Literature*

Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job are the most notable examples in the Bible of what is known as Wisdom literature. Many of the sayings found in the Book of Proverbs seem to be mere expressions of worldly wisdom, and yet not a few of them bear a distinctly ethical and religious form. But as a matter of fact the whole book, if interpreted comprehensively, is not only moral and religious, but it is deeply philosophical and spiritual in that it finds the only true and ultimate basis for right conduct and righteous character in faith in God, in that God has established such an order of things that the highest good can be realised in this life only in and through right conduct and righteous character. Indeed no book in the Bible relates God so closely to worldly wisdom and makes success and real happiness in life to be so closely related to faith in God and obedience to his wise laws as do the writings of these wise men of Israel. The writer of Ecclesiastes is sometimes referred to as the pessimist of the Bible. He had evidently had experience in sin and in the evil consequences of sin beyond that of most men; and the philosophy of human life, viewed from the standpoint of sin and of the suffering and shame which it produces, is nothing but “vanity of vanities: all is vanity.”

But out of such morbid views of life, born of sin, inspiration guides to a conclusion made all the more impressive and glorious by contrast with the dark and gloomy background contained in the body of the book—viz., “Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth”; “Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man.”

The book of Job was written to refute the idea that seems to have been long prevalent among the Jews, and has not even yet disappeared from the world, that the natural and physical evils that befall one in life are sent by God as a punishment

<sup>1</sup> “Man and the Attainment of Immortality,” p. 282.

for sin. The why of evil, both physical and moral, in the universe of an all-good and all-powerful God, is a problem that will present itself anew to thinking and perplexed minds in all ages of the world. If the book of Job does not solve the problem and answer all our questions, it at least throws a flood of light upon it which inquiring and truth-seeking spirits will ever gratefully welcome. "I call the book of Job," says Thomas Carlyle, in his "Heroes and Hero Worship," "apart from all theories about it, one of the grandest things ever written with pen. One feels indeed as if it were not Hebrew, such a noble universality, different from noble patriotism or sectarianism, reigns in it. It is our first and oldest statement of the never-ending problem—man's destiny and God's ways with him here on this earth. And all in such free, flowing outlines; grand in its sincerity, in its simplicity, in its epic melody and repose of reconciliation. There is the seeing eye, the mildly understanding heart. So true every way; true eyesight and vision for all things; material things no less than spiritual. A noble book, all men's book!" No one can read Job thoughtfully and the other Wisdom books and not feel that the God of the prophets is talking to him in and through these sayings of Hebrew Proverbial philosophy.

##### *5. God in the Psalms*

We speak of poets as possessed of a "divine gift," and as being "inspired." If this be true of poets generally as such, how much more truly may it be said of the only divinely inspired poets, those of Holy Writ! John Bright, the distinguished English statesman, once remarked to Mr. Gladstone that he was content to rest upon the book of the Psalms alone the whole question as to whether or not there is a divine revelation from God to man. He said that it was inconceivable to him that a book so immeasurably exalted above all the religious literature of antiquity could have been produced by man without special and supernatural aid. "And all the wonders of Greek civilisation heaped together," rejoined Mr. Gladstone, "are less wonderful to me than is the

simple book of the Psalms—the history of a human soul in relation to its Maker.” A purer monotheism is nowhere to be found than in the Psalms. The spirituality, omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, holiness, goodness, love and other attributes of God are set forth here in a clearness and variety of form that makes the Psalms a perfect treasure-house of knowledge concerning God. The God of the Psalmist is not only the Creator and Preserver of all things, but he is a prayer-hearing and a prayer-answering God to whom every truly penitent and trusting soul can appeal with confidence of being heard. The Psalmist’s God, so full of tender mercy and loving-kindness, is surely none other than the God whom Jesus taught us to call “our Father.”

The only portion of the Old Testament which we ever find bound together single and alone with the New Testament is the Book of Psalms, indicating that this book of prayer and praise has in a sense passed over into and become a part of the New Testament as is true of no other portion of the Hebrew Scriptures. We pass, therefore, by easy transition from the God of the Psalms to the God of the New Testament.

## II

### THE NEW TESTAMENT REVELATION OF GOD

“Literature has its miracles, and the New Testament is a literary miracle;” so writes an appreciative and enthusiastic student of the Sacred Canon. And in what does he find the proof that the New Testament is a “literary miracle”? It is this:—

“Its writers were a cluster of Galilean fishermen and peasants; there was only one man of genius and scholarship in the group. And yet this book has reshaped the history of the world. In Stratford-on-Avon stands a great building in which all the books which were written about Shakespeare’s plays are gathered. But if all the books which have caught their inspiration from the twenty-seven tiny pamphlets which constitute the New Testament were gathered together, no

building ever yet erected by human architecture could contain them. That tiny book has built every church throughout Christendom. It has inspired all missionary effort. Its words are written on the tombstones beneath which our dead sleep. And the original inspiration which Christ promised was not confined to the men who wrote it. It is in the book itself to-day; it is within the reach of every reader of the book, and all Christian experience attests that fact.”<sup>1</sup>

There are two ways in which the reader of the New Testament finds himself approaching God: first, in the revelation of him as the loving heavenly Father, under which title Jesus referred to him with such emphasis and insistence as to make it impossible for us to think of him in any other light and relationship than that of divine Fatherhood. But the more one reads the New Testament the more he finds himself learning what God is like, and what he is, not only in and through what Christ says of him, but in and through what Christ is in his own person and character. So much of God does Christ seem to have in himself as shown by what he says, and does, and is, that the only term that seems adequate to express what men think of him is to call him “God incarnate.” When the New Testament therefore reveals God to us as one who is related to us (1) as a Divine Father and (2) as Deity incarnated in our humanity, it brings God nearer to us than had hitherto been conceived possible.

### *I. The Fatherhood and Love of God*

The first and greatest service which Christ rendered to the human race by his teachings was—and this is a truth which we must needs utter and repeat over and over again—to reveal God as a Father and to make him lovable. There are three notable ways in which Christ revealed the Fatherhood and loveliness of God:— (1) By showing that love is the leading attribute in God’s nature, and that this divine love takes in the entire human race: “God so loved *the world*.” And its *intension* is as deep as its *extension* is broad: “God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son.”

<sup>1</sup> Dr. W. H. Fitchett.

There is no expression of self-sacrificing love known to human thought greater than parting with an only son. Love begets love; and nothing but love can beget love. God wins our love by his love for us. We love him because he first loved us.

(2) By revealing *himself as the Son of the Father*, and showing that his Father—who was also our Father—was like him. He was the image of the Father, so that to see him was virtually to see the Father; and as the visible Son was the personal embodiment of everything that was lovable and winning, it was impossible not to love the invisible Father, who is in all respects like the Son.

(3) By showing us that *God craves our love* first and above everything else. The craving of a soul reveals its true inner nature. God not simply commands us to love him, but he craves our love. This shows that his inmost nature is love. Whatever reveals that God is love makes God a lovable Being.

## 2. *The Divine Sonship of Christ*

The first three books of the New Testament, commonly called the Synoptical Gospels, present in historical form a synopsis of the leading events in the life of Christ. It is pre-eminently the facts concerning the human Christ with which they are occupied. Only towards the last do they reach the point of clear and definite declaration of his deity. But no matter how far back they go in tracing his human genealogy, and no matter how closely they follow the life he lived in the flesh, they are always moving towards a goal—through the human to the divine-human, and through the divine-human to the divine transcendence—to the declaration of his deity as “the Son of the living God.” Nevertheless it is not to the Synoptic Gospels but to the writings of St. John and St. Paul that we must turn for that interpretation and presentation of Christ that never leaves us anywhere or at any time in doubt as to whether or not the writer believes him to be divine. Of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament eighteen come from these two writers—and the book of Acts, though written by St. Luke, is so thoroughly dominated by the mind and utter-

ances of Paul as to make it proper to add it to the Pauline literature. In other words more than two-thirds of the New Testament comes from the two writers whose interpretation of Christ in terms of deity is the most dominant characteristic of their writings.

### *3. Paul's Interpretation of Christ as God Incarnate*

Of these two, John, though first as a disciple and apostle, is last as a writer. Indeed the very earliest of the New Testament writings were certain Epistles of the Apostle Paul. Although in the matter of coming into the Christian fold Paul describes himself as one "born out of due season," in the making of the literature of the Christian Scriptures he is in the opinion of Biblical scholars the pioneer and forerunner of all the New Testament writers, which fact gives to his writings a unique place of both historic and doctrinal importance. For this and other reasons the highest significance attaches to his conception of God and to his interpretation of the Person of Christ in terms of Deity which changed the whole current of his life and completely transformed his faith. As the result of a most remarkable experience, he was led to believe not only that Christ was the long expected Messiah of the Hebrew Scriptures but even more—he was the eternal Son of God who became incarnate in human form for the salvation of mankind from sin.

No student of the Pauline Epistles can fail to see that the most conspicuous feature of the theology of Paul is its Christocentric character. Everything is treated with reference to Christ. The greatness and glory of Christ as a Saviour are portrayed in ever rich and glowing colours over against the dark background of Jewish legalism, from servile bondage to which Paul was saved only by the personal power of the crucified but risen Redeemer, who was, to his faith, both God and man. Paul refers the work of creation entirely to Christ. (Col. i. 16.) His doctrine of sin and its dominion over man is closely connected with his conception of Christ as the second Adam, who breaks its dominion. (Rom. v.) God is to Paul "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," and the most

conspicuous attributes in the divine nature are those revealed in and through Christ. The love of the Father finds its most practical and helpful interpretation in the gift of his Son and in the life and death of Christ who laid down his life for the salvation of men. He emphasises the great work of the Holy Spirit in the reproduction and development of the Christly character in man. Paul's doctrine of prayer, of justification, of the Christian life, of the future life—these and many other doctrines all centre in and radiate from the divine Lordship of Christ.<sup>1</sup> The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father are divine blessings of co-equal value that represent the highest and best that Heaven can give to men on earth.

St. Paul magnifies God's love for all mankind; and the greatest expression of that love he found, as does every New Testament writer, in God's gift of his only Son, who was in the bosom of the Father and the express image of his Person. But there is one divine attribute that finds its clearest and strongest expression in Paul's writings. Paul more than any other Biblical writer sets forth the eternal foreknowledge and purpose of God in creation and redemption; but these have respect always to man's moral free agency and responsibility. If what God is now doing is in accord with the exercise of perfect freedom on the part of men, then it follows that God's foreknowledge and definite purposes in eternity concerning men were also in perfect accord with human freedom. He taught that God elects and predestinates; but men are "elect according to the foreknowledge of God" and "whom God foreknew, them he predestinated." If God's knowledge of a free agent's present volition is not the cause of it, but, on the contrary, the volition is the cause of the knowledge of it, the like relation must exist between divine foreknowledge and whatever is foreknown: the thing foreknown, be it a free volition or something else, must be the cause of the fore-

<sup>1</sup> Dr. H. B. Carré finds in the "Cosmic Significance" of Christ's redemptive work the truth which St. Paul most of all emphasised and magnified in his interpretation of Christ as Redeemer and as the revealer of God's purpose and method of redemption. See his volume titled "Paul's Doctrine of Redemption."

knowledge of it. No attribute of God is more superhuman and divine than that of foreknowing how a free agent is going to decide a matter that is conditioned on his free will. But the divine omniscience includes the foreknowledge of all events whether they be dependent for their determining cause on the Divine Will or on human free wills. It is God's purposes and plans in and through Christ and his foreknowledge of the result of Christ's redemptive work that make it a work not of unknown contingency but of foreknown certainty as to the final issues; it is this confidence in God's knowledge and wisdom and love and power that makes Paul's doctrine of divine foreknowledge and predestination one that is full of comfort, and the foundation of the largest possible optimism as to the future. "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal: The Lord knoweth them that are his, and let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." There are no contingencies so far as God's knowledge is concerned; and if man wishes to remove all contingencies from his knowledge of the future pertaining to himself, here is indicated the way in which he may do it—let him depart from all iniquity.

#### 4. *St. John's Interpretation of Christ as Divine Love Incarnate*

John's connection with Christ began several years before Paul's conversion, and yet he outlived Paul some thirty years, as indeed he outlived all those who along with himself were associated with our Lord during the days of his flesh. Being the youngest of the group and "that disciple whom Jesus loved," there is every reason to believe that he combined, along with his intimate personal knowledge of Jesus, an intellectuality and spiritual discernment that would mark him out as the one best suited to write the final word for the New Testament Canon before it closed and give the final interpretation of Christ that was to come from the Apostolic group.

The ethical and spiritual interpretation of the Person and work of the historic Christ is the task which St. John under-

took to perform in writing the fourth Gospel, and so successfully did he accomplish this task that it has been considered the consummation and crown of the entire body of New Testament writings.

The author of the fourth Gospel tells us toward the close what motive he had in writing it: "These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name." This conclusion is in perfect accord with the great cardinal truths enunciated in the opening verses to this Gospel. The first chapter strikes the lofty keynote of the entire book in asserting (1) The pre-existence and deity of Christ: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (2) Christ is the Creator of all things: "All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made." (3) He was not only Creator, but the Source of all life and light: "In him was life; and the life was the light of men. . . . That was the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." (4) The incarnation: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us . . . full of grace and truth." (5) The relation of faith and the new birth to each other and to Christ: "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." (6) His teachings as to the Godhead may be summed up in declaring that God is a spiritual Being, sustaining the relation of Father to all men, but especially to them that believe; that the leading attribute of his nature is love; that his love for man has found its most perfect expression in the gift, first, of his own eternal Son as Redeemer and, secondly, of the Holy Spirit to apply the benefits of Christ's redeeming work to the salvation of men.

But these doctrines all seem to grow out of his main proposition, which is never lost sight of—viz., Jesus Christ, the divine and eternal Son of God, incarnated to reveal God as a Father, and to save lost sinners and make them sons of God. When we think of the circumstances under which the fourth Gospel

was written and by whom—how that it was written from sixty to sixty-five years after the crucifixion, and nearly forty years after the other Gospels had been written, and by one who was on terms of closest intimacy with our Lord during his entire ministry and who, both because of that personal association and because of the ripened conviction of more than sixty years of meditation, profoundly believed that his Lord was none other than the eternal Son of God come in the flesh, and that this fact of his divinity was the one supreme fact concerning his person and work which transcended in importance every other fact—when we take all these facts into consideration, it cannot seem strange that John should feel moved to write, and should be divinely inspired to write, a volume which should set forth and emphasise the divinity of Christ as the culmination of the New Testament revelation of God.

### III

#### SUMMARY OF THE FUNDAMENTAL TRUTHS OF BIBLICAL THEISM

This survey of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments with special reference to their teachings concerning God has brought out five notable and cardinal facts as to the nature and attributes of the Divine Being which serve to distinguish the Biblical conception of God from that of all other religions, and which, although enumerated before in answering the question, "Who is God?", need to be referred to again at this point, to make a complete presentation of the Bible doctrine of God.

##### *I. The Unity of God*

The Divine Unity means that there is and can be but one God, and is opposed to the polytheism of the heathen religions. The only pure monotheism known to the ancient world was that found in the Hebrew religion. Notwithstanding the fact that all religions of human origin have had "gods many and lords many," and the religion of the Bible alone has

affirmed the oneness of God, yet human reason, when once enlightened, perceives that there is and can be but one God. To affirm the existence of many gods is to deny the existence of any real and true God. Many gods mean no God. When our Lord was asked what was the first and greatest commandment, his answer was: "The first of all commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord." This part of our Lord's reply—affirming that the assertion of the unity and personality of the divine Being was the fundamental fact in Israel's faith—is too often overlooked. But it would be just as improper to stop here and not quote the significant words which follow and are a part of the very same sentence: "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind,—which conjunction of divine unity and human love implies that faith in the unity of God is essential to any and all real love to God. To believe in many gods is to love no God at all. Polytheists fear their gods but never love them. Only those who believe in one God are capable of exercising that highest of all creaturely acts of devotion and worship—love, adoring love.

## 2. *The Spirituality of God*

When the Scriptures declare that "God is a Spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and truth," it is not so much a revelation of his possessing the attribute of spirituality, as it is a declaration that his essential nature is spirit. Spirit has none of the properties of matter. A spirit has consciousness, intelligence, moral nature, freedom and similar attributes, none of which are predicate of matter. Man has a physical and a spiritual nature, a visible body and an invisible spirit. The latter is the true self, the true ego, that which makes him capable of worship. There could be no such thing as spiritual religion if God were not a Spirit; and whatever in man's consciousness assures him of his own spirituality proves to him at the same time that God is a Spirit; for from an infinite divine Spirit alone could finite human spirits come. The Scriptures in revealing God as a Spirit mean to teach not only that God is not a *thing*, made of

wood or stone, as heathen gods are, but also that he is not possessed of two natures, physical and spiritual, as we are—that he has no corporeal form that may be perceived by the physical senses, nor can he be represented by anything material or visible to the eye. God is possessed only of such attributes as we call spiritual in ourselves. Although, being a Spirit, he is invisible—and without bodily parts, he is yet spoken of at times as if he were possessed of body as well as spirit—this anthropomorphic representation of him is an accommodation to our modes of thinking, which seems to be necessary in order to bring infinite Personality within the categories of human thought. The contrast between the pure monotheism of the Bible and the gross polytheism of heathen religions, great as it is, is perhaps not so convincing a proof of the divine origin of the Bible doctrine of God as is the emphasis laid in the Scriptures upon the spirituality of God. This is pre-eminently the one feature in our faith which raises our conception of God and our religion above the sordid religions of the heathen world and invests it with that element of exalted mysticism and of mystery which is not only befitting but essential to a religion of the spirit that is also an altogether rational religion.

### *3. The Personality of God*

God is everywhere throughout the Bible recognised as a self-conscious and rational being, distinct and separate from everything else in the universe. The divine personality of Hebrew and Christian faith is opposed to the pantheistic conception of God, which confuses Deity with the phenomenal world, affirming that everything in its ultimate analysis is God, matter being nothing but the phenomenal and ever-changing "existence form" of God; and hence God is incapable of consciousness except as he comes to consciousness in finite spirits, and ought, therefore, to be referred to as *It*, not *He*. But our individuality and personality imply and necessitate personality in God; for from an infinite divine Person alone could finite human persons come. There could be no such thing as personal religion if God were not himself a person.

The God of the Bible is thus seen to be not simply a Being characterised by unity and spirituality, an immeasurable, non-material, incomprehensible Being; but he is a Personal Being capable of relationship and fellowship with other personal beings. Not until personality has been added to the conceptions of unity and spirituality do the noblest attributes of Deity become possible—freedom, wisdom, holiness, love, and the like. This Biblical conception of God is so rational and self-consistent as to commend itself to every man's reason and heart and conscience. No man can read the Bible constantly and wander very far away from the thought of a personal God. An infinite personality may have its difficulties to thought, but the difficulties that beset faith in the impersonal infinite "It" of Pantheism are more numerous and far more serious.

#### 4. *The Triunity of the Divine Being*

Perhaps the divinest feature of the Bible revelation of God, one that meets us and greets us wherever we move in Christian theology, is that reserved for the New Testament, which adds to his unity, spirituality and personality that which floods his Being with light and not only brings him near to us but makes us see him as one who is altogether lovable. Not until this revelation comes does it fully appear what it means for us men to bear the image of "Our Father, who art in heaven," which is the invocation that the Bible places in the mouth of every one who approaches and addresses the divine Being—words which carry in them the high and precious privilege of divine sonship, making known to us that we are more than servants, that we are sons. In all heathenism the idea of the Fatherhood of God has never entered, save, perchance, as the passing fancy or occasional metaphor of a poet. But the God of Scripture is "one Spirit, one Lord, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in all."

The revelation of God as a Being whose relation to the human race is best expressed by the term, Father, does not exhaust the meaning of this most significant of all the designations of deity. The divine Fatherhood as revealed by Christ goes deeper into the very nature and essence of deity than is

indicated in his being thus related to the human race. He is more than the heavenly Father of mankind. He is also related to Jesus Christ as Father and it is revealed that he has sustained this relation from eternity. Inseparable from this revelation of God's eternal Fatherhood and involved in it is the further revelation that there has eternally existed with God the Father a second Person related to him as a Son and bearing his own divine nature, and this Son, in order to save man from sin and the better to reveal God, became incarnate in a historic person named Jesus of Nazareth, who dwelt among men and being recognised in due time as divine was worshipped as God. Then came the further revelation that a third Person has eternally existed with the Father and the Son, called the Holy Spirit, his nature being no less divine than that of the Son, and to him in a peculiar sense is committed the dispensing of the benefits of Christ's redemptive work.

While thus affirming the existence of three different Persons in the Godhead, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the New Testament reaffirms and emphasises the essential unity of the divine Being, and the recognition of this double truth—that God is one in three and three in one, one in nature and three in personal mode of manifestation—has necessitated the coining of a word not found in the Scriptures, viz., tri-unity, or Trinity. The three persons of the Triune Godhead are co-equal and co-eternal; nevertheless, in the order of thought, God the Father comes first, as the rational *principatus* of Deity, God the Son comes second, and God the Holy Spirit comes third. While this revelation of God transcends, it does not contradict human reason. If we can believe that a thing is without understanding how it is—and this is true of many things that enter into the faith of all rational beings—we are not required to transgress the bounds of reason when we are called on to believe that God is one in one sense and three in another sense.

There is no revelation of the Trinity of God except in and through the divine and eternal Sonship of Christ; and it is only in connection with the revelation of the divine and say-

ing power of Christ that the personality and deity of the Holy Spirit are revealed. Indeed it may be said that while the elements of the doctrine of the Divine Trinity are found in the New Testament, it was left to the post-Apostolic Church to define and formulate this most transcendent of all the doctrines of Christian theism.

This is the Bible doctrine of God in its main outlines and most important elements. It carries in itself the proof of its origin in the self-revelation of the Divine Being and is not dependent for its authority over the human conscience upon our rightly adjusting the divine and the human elements in the Bible.

##### 5. *The Post-Apostolic Development of the Doctrine of God*

We will not go far astray if we affirm that the doctrine of the Fatherhood and love of God really occupies a larger place in the thought and theology of the modern Church than it did in the mind of the early disciples who knew Christ in the flesh. They were absorbed in the living Christ, listening to his words, witnessing his deeds and interpreting his person in terms of an ever increasing divine significance which found its highest expression in the confession of St. Peter at Cæsarea Philippi. The early disciples of Christ could not possibly take in as we can the ethical and spiritual value of the revelation of the Fatherhood of God. Their thought centred in the Messiah. And when he was no more the living Christ he became more and more as they thought of him, the divine Christ, until presently it came to be, as shown by the writings of St. Paul and St. John, that the divine Person whom they worshipped and who completely filled their minds and hearts and absorbed their thoughts, was the Incarnate Son who was to them not only the perfect revealer of God, but the complete embodiment of God—so that it came to pass that, instead of defining Christ by his relationship to God, they found it most helpful to define God by his relationship to Christ. “The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” is the way they defined God.

Nor did the doctrine of the Trinity occupy much, if

any, place in the thoughts of the disciples in the period covered by the New Testament. It took time for reflection in order to see that a profound problem for thought and faith was involved in asserting that there was and could be but one God while three different Persons were yet recognised and worshipped as God. If they saw the intellectual difficulty involved they said nothing about it. The incarnate, divine-human Christ, of the seed of Abraham as to his human nature, and declared to be the Son of God with power as to his super-human nature—to interpret him in the deep, divine significance of his two natures—that was a problem which was left for later generations of Christian believers to solve. The one great contribution which the New Testament writers make to the doctrine of God is found in their interpretation of Jesus in terms of Deity so that he who called himself the Son of Man became for them the Son of God—and all subsequent history has proved that they did not err in so interpreting him.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE PROGRESSIVE REVELATION OF GOD  
IN THE SCRIPTURES



## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### THE PROGRESSIVE REVELATION OF GOD IN THE SCRIPTURES

Our study of the Biblical revelation of God, contained in the foregoing chapter, may be said to have assumed more than the facts justify, that an exalted idea and altogether adequate knowledge of God was imparted to the human race at its beginning and maintained intact thereafter by the chosen circle within which God continued to reveal himself. In other words, it may be said that we seem to have ignored the many evidences that are found within the Scriptures themselves that the conception of God possessed by the ancient peoples whose religious history is traced in the Old Testament was one of evolution from more or less primitive, crude and confused ideas of Deity towards that which was higher and truer. It is claimed by many that the primitive idea of a tribal God whose power was available for his own people alone, which prevailed among other ancient peoples, also characterised the religion of the early Hebrews, and that the prophetic conception of Jehovah as the one and only God of the whole earth was attained only at a later date. We must now consider to what extent this is true.

#### I

##### DIVINE REVELATION AND ITS HUMAN INTERPRETATION

###### *i. Progress of Divine Revelation Conditioned on Man's Interpretation of Revelation.*

It is very important that we make a distinction between God's revelations of himself and man's interpretation of those revelations. God's revelation of himself—in nature, in the consciousness and experience of individuals, in human history,

in his providential government of men and nations, and possibly in other more direct ways—needs to be clearly distinguished from men's recognition, apprehension and interpretation of these revelations. The slow progress made by man in his conception and interpretation of God is not due to divine tardiness, to a lack of revelation on God's part, so much as to a lack, on man's part, of spiritual insight and vision, a lack of properly apprehending and interpreting what God has revealed and is continuously revealing of himself.

Men differ greatly as receivers of what is spoken to them—some take in more than others—and one really hears only so much as he takes in of what is uttered within his hearing. Men differ also greatly in the power of interpreting what they receive from other men, and differ in like manner in their power of interpreting what they receive from God. Yet again, men differ greatly in their power of transmitting to others their interpretations of what they receive. The reason why the Jewish race was God's elect and chosen people in ancient times was not due so much to favouritism on God's part—that is, to his giving them what he gave to no others—as to the fact that they were better interpreters of those divine revelations whose "lines went out through all the earth and whose words went to the end of the world." This explains why the Abrahamic race rather than others were elected to be channels of revelation to the whole world.

But individual Hebrews even among the prophets differed greatly one from another. Samuel, the prophet, was a much better receiver and interpreter of what God said than was the brusque and burly athlete Samson; but Isaiah was a better receiver and interpreter than even Samuel; and his better power of not only receiving a vision of God and interpreting it but of transmitting "the word of the Lord" that came unto him in and through the vision, has made the book that bears his name to be numbered among the greatest religious classics of the world. Among the apostles of our Lord differences in intellectual and spiritual capacity for receiving and interpreting and transmitting the truths which the Master spake to them, are very discernible. In all these respects St. John surpassed

his fellow apostles, even as among those born out of due season St. Paul in these particulars excelled those who in other respects might have been his equals. We are all receivers from God, and interpreters of what we receive from him; and in proportion to the largeness of our receipts and the accuracy of our interpretations is the measure of truth or error in our conception of God and in our power to make him known to others. The self-revealing God has never had but one who was a perfect receiver, a perfect interpreter and a perfect transmitter to others of his revealed word and will—and that was Jesus Christ—and this is why, ever since he came, he takes the place of God as revealer to men, and becomes in what he is and says and does the very self-revelation of God.

## *2. Progress in Knowledge of God Retarded by Human Interpreters and Not by Lack of Revelation*

Now in thus declaring that the slow progress that our race has made in coming to a true interpretation and knowledge of God is man's fault—that it is due not to the lack of revelation on God's part, but to those who, dull of mind and slow of heart, have not received and rightly interpreted the revelations he has made—not, in thus speaking, are we contradicting, but on the contrary exemplifying the Scripture which speaks of God having at different times and in divers manners in times past spoken unto us by the prophets, and last of all by his own Son. God not only does his work in this world in and through men, but he reveals his will to mankind in and through men, and the men whom he chooses as his channels of revelation are always those who as receivers, interpreters and forth-tellers, are the best human instruments available—those best fitted intellectually, morally and spiritually, to make known his will to men. When these conditions and limitations that accompany the progressive self-revelation of God to men are duly considered, it will be seen that what appears to be the tardiness and imperfection of these divine revelations are not due to God but to the human free agents who are the recipients and interpreters of that which is revealed. This will appear all the more true if we reflect that God's revelations were not made

audibly in spoken words, but were as a rule, we have every reason to believe, spoken with the still small voice of the Spirit to the inner man.

"Religion," says a recent writer, "cannot possibly rise higher than the stage of development of the people of whose ideals it is the expression. Nothing could show that process of development better than the Bible itself, for the early books of the Old Testament reveal the conception of God, characteristic indeed of the age, but not at all satisfying to us, for it was a God who was indeed benevolent and just toward his own chosen people, but utterly regardless of the welfare of those outside this chosen group. It is certain that no modern religious leader believes in a god who has the attributes which some of the early leaders of Israel ascribed to their Deity. This imperfect conception of God is developed and refined through the successive periods of sacred history as portrayed in the Bible until it finally culminates in the all-embracing love and Fatherhood of God preached by Jesus. He who would deny this development process going on in both science and religion, and clearly revealed in all the records of the past which we have, must shut his eyes to the indisputable facts as they are presented in all history, including sacred history."<sup>1</sup>

## II

### PROGRESSIVE REVELATION OF GOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Nothing is more important in the study of the Old Testament, and nothing is more necessary to its proper interpretation, than a recognition of the fact that God's nature and attributes were only gradually revealed and slowly understood by the children of Israel. Not to recognise this fact may turn into a critic one who, if he should recognise and duly estimate the gradualness and progressiveness of the divine revelation, will be filled with amazement at the superior knowledge of God possessed by the descendants of Abraham as compared with all other ancient people.

<sup>1</sup> "The Christian Century."

*I. Superiority of the Early Hebrew Narratives  
to Heathen Records*

Students of the Old Testament generally believe that the first six books of the Old Testament, known as the "Hexateuch," were composed of a number of different documents, varying from one another in their original dates, and containing not a few variations in their historic details and in their interpretations of events. Not only the books in their present form but the constituent documents, says Dr. Fisher, are considered to have been far later in their origin than tradition had taught. The application of the principles and methods of literary and historical criticism and of the results of archaeological investigations in Bible lands to the study of the literature covering the most ancient periods of Biblical history have affected in many ways the interpretation of this early literature. The Babylonian and Chaldaic accounts of creation and the flood found on the clay tablets unearthed many years ago by archaeologists are so similar in most of their details to the Scripture narratives that it is impossible not to infer a common origin. And why should it not be so, seeing that Ur of the Chaldees, the land that Abraham came from, is located in the country that yielded these archaeological tablets, which so wonderfully confirm and reinforce the book of Genesis in its record of these primitive traditions. But one characteristic of the Old Testament narrative stands out in distinct relief—and this is true, no matter when, or where, or by whom the various books were written—it is the fact of divine revelation. It is evident from the very first verse of Genesis that the legends of the Babylonians and other tribes kindred to the Hebrews have been sifted of their polytheistic elements. One of the most eminent and liberal-minded of German theologians was guilty of no exaggeration in the remark that the first three chapters of Genesis contain more moral and religious truth than all other books written independently of the influence of the Bible.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See the chapter on "The Gradualness of Revelation" in Fisher's "Grounds of Theistic and Christian Belief," upon which we are drawing

*2. Progress from Lower to Higher Conceptions of God  
a Proof of Revelation*

Just what precisely was the conception of God which was entertained in the earliest periods of Hebrew history is a subject concerning which different views are held by different Biblical scholars. Traditional theology has taught that in the first pair, created perfect, the human race was started with a perfect knowledge of the one and only true God, and that any loss of that true knowledge of the true God was due to sin, to the fall of man and his wandering away from God—that idolatry, polytheism, and all other false and degrading conceptions of God are convincing proofs of the descent of man from the first exalted mental and moral estate in which he was started at creation. In the estimation of this school of theological thought the admission that the Hebrew conception of God was developed by slow degrees from lower ideas and conceptions is incompatible with what is regarded by them as the true doctrine of Biblical inspiration. But many modern Bible scholars think that they can trace within the Old Testament itself the stages of a distinct growth in the development of the conception of God. "If there be reasons for believing that among the early Hebrews Jehovah was regarded merely as a tribal Deity, certain it is that this conception by degrees grew into that of a supreme Sovereign, righteous in his character, with an expanded, even world-wide control. This purifying and elevating effect, this monotheistic, ethical faith, so in contrast with Semitic history elsewhere, is inexplicable save on the supposition that it is due to the self-revelation of God."

That the process of expelling the vestiges of polytheism and image worship from the practices of the Israelitish people was accomplished slowly, says Dr. Fisher, is sufficiently clear. "The cult of household images did not at once disappear. Scholars of high repute consider the earliest beliefs of the descendants of Abraham to have fallen short of a positive freely in this chapter. Though written many years ago, it is a book of abiding value to students of theism.

monotheism, and to have been rather a monolatry—the worship of one God to the exclusion of all other worship, but without an explicit disbelief in the existence of other divinities who had respectively their own earthly realms to govern." Jephthah says to a Moabite King: "Wilt thou not possess that which Chemosh thy God giveth thee to possess? So whomsoever the Lord our God hath dispossessed from before us, them will we possess." It would be natural for the half-enlightened Hebrews to imagine that there was some sort of territorial limit to the jurisdiction of the God whom they worshipped. The progress of Hebrew faith would then include, first, the idea of the God of Israel as more powerful than all other deities; and then, later, the ascription to him of almighty, and the distinct conviction that all other gods are fictitious beings. The path from a more narrow conception of God to a pure and absolute monotheism involved thus a deepening and clarifying ethical idea of the attributes of Israel's God. If Jehovah at the outset was regarded as simply the tribal God, the sovereign protector of that one people, while the other nations were imagined to have each its own guardian divinity, the expansion of this primitive notion into the pure and lofty conception of the only true and living God, the world's Creator and Ruler, which is presented in soul-stirring language by the most ancient prophets, is a marvel. The transformation is really insoluble on any naturalistic theory. Even on the supposition that there was this gradual uplifting of religion from the low plane on which all pagan nations stood, and that the notion of a mere local divinity, of limited control, gave way to the conception of one Lord of heaven and earth, the Maker of all things, the Ruler of nations, the universal Sovereign—even on this supposition, no conclusion would be so reasonable as that God Almighty took this method of gradually disclosing his being and attributes to that portion of the human race from whom, as from a centre, the light of the true faith was eventually to radiate to the rest of mankind.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Fisher's "Grounds of Theistic and Christian Belief."

*3. Progressive Ethicisation of the Idea of God*

It thus appears that not only was the truth of the unity and the universal sovereignty of God a conception of the divine Being that was attained slowly and that was only gradually and progressively revealed by God to Israel, but no less discernible in the Old Testament history is the evidence of a progressive and increasing ethicisation of the character of God as he is conceived and interpreted by the Hebrew nation. In the early periods of Hebrew history things were attributed to God which are irreconcilable not only with the character of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ but with the God of the nation as he is interpreted and revealed by the later prophets, by whom he is declared to be a holy and righteous Sovereign who can neither think nor do any wrong himself, nor approve of that which is wrong in others. "In the introductory periods of revelation," says Dr. Fisher, "a positive and immediate agency in the production of moral evil is ascribed to God. Sometimes, for example, the hardening of the heart is spoken of as if it were divinely produced, and as if it were the end which is directly aimed at. Such passages, taken by themselves, would warrant the harshest doctrine of reprobation which hyper-Calvinism has ever broached." Of course, such passages must not be "taken by themselves alone," or, if taken thus, they must be understood to represent only one stage in a progressive revelation of God, or in a progressive interpretation of God, that was ever moving forward towards the revelation and the interpretation of "the Holy One of Israel" as one who could neither think, nor feel, nor will, nor do anything that was morally wrong.

It is only by recognising that the conception of God as held by some individual Hebrews differed from that held by others,—or that the conception changed and became more ethical as time advanced and the race learned in the school of experience what God is like—that we can explain such a moral difficulty in the Hebrew Scriptures as the discrepancy in the two accounts given in the Old Testament of what "moved" David to number the people. In 2 Samuel xxiv. 1,

it is said that God moved David against Israel and bade him go out and number the people. The later account of the same event, found in 1 Chronicles xxi, 1, says that it was Satan who provoked David to number Israel. In both cases, however, it is regarded as a sin involving guilt on the part of David, for which he must be punished. The two narratives declare that God offered to David a choice of three different forms of punishment,—famine, war and pestilence. He chooses the last named, and as a consequence seventy thousand of the people die in three days' time. The writer in Second Samuel seems to see no moral difficulty whatever in having God to instigate a deed which is pronounced a sin; nor does either writer seem to see any moral difficulty in having seventy thousand innocent people suffer death as a punishment for David's guilt, or any difficulty in making it appear that this pestilential holocaust of human beings sufficed to fully satisfy and appease "the anger of the Lord" against Israel and against David. The fact that one narrative says that God offered David seven years of famine, while the other says it was three years, is but a trifling discrepancy as compared with the moral difficulties to which attention is here called. But all these discrepancies alike, whether they involve a trifling difference as in the matter of numbers, or the more serious differences in the interpretation of the moral character of God, prove that there is a human element in both the matter and the manner of the Biblical revelation which is a possible source of error; and that the recognition of this fallible human element in the Bible is a help and not a hindrance to faith in God. The progressive character of the Hebrew revelation of the Divine Being and the moral vindication of His character who is the one and only true God and who possesses without limitation every possible attribute of personality and perfection, are thus seen to be doctrines which support each other, and which, taken together, help to explain an otherwise very perplexing moral difficulty in the Old Testament.

The progressive development of the Israelitish nation in their social, ethical and religious ideas and ideals and practices is closely related to, indeed finds its highest expression in,

their interpretation of God. In the farewell message of Moses recorded in the thirty-third chapter of Deuteronomy, his description of God as "the Lord that came from Sinai and rose up from Seir," is followed by oft-quoted words of rare poetic beauty and high spiritual import to which we have already made reference: "The eternal God is thy refuge and underneath are the everlasting arms." And these words in turn are followed immediately by others that indicated in what way they looked for the proof of God's love for and protection over them: "and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee, and shall say, Destroy them." The sequel shows in what way they expected this providential purpose of God to be realised. The conquest of Canaan that followed the death of Moses involved cruelties in the utter destruction of men, women and children, which, according to the Scripture narrative, were either ordered by God or approved by him, but which it is not easy to reconcile with the character of God as he has been revealed to us by Christ, or even by the later prophets. The difference is not in God; he was the same then that he is now. The difference is in man's conceptions and interpretations of God that prevailed at different times;—we say at different times, though more or less different interpretations of God could doubtless have been found existing at one and the same time among different individuals in the nation, or among different schools of thought. In this case the progress in moral ideas and ideals would be explained on the principle of the survival of the fittest. The most ethical conception of God is that most fit to survive in the moral evolution that has always been going on.<sup>1</sup>

### III

#### PROGRESSIVE REVELATION OF GOD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Coming now to the New Testament we find that short as is the period covered by its records—less than a century—

<sup>1</sup> See George Adam Smith's strong presentation of the proof of a Divine Revelation in the Old Testament, contained in his "Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament."

there takes placing during this time a manifest change and marked progress in the conception of God. And great as this change was in its bearing on the conception of Jehovah, it was even greater in its bearing on God as related to and revealed in the Messiah and the Holy Spirit.

### *I. Progress in the Conception of God from Legalism to Loving Fatherhood*

Following the great period in Hebrew history that was dominated by the great prophets and characterised by lofty ethical and spiritual ideas concerning God, there came a night of punctilious legalism. The prevalent conception of God in the time of Christ was legalistic rather than ethical and spiritual. It is mainly from St. Paul and the Pharisees that we learn what was the conception of God prevalent among the Jews at the beginning of the Christian era. The dominant idea of Deity may be described as legal—God was the great law-maker and law-enforcer, a divine Taskmaster to be feared and obeyed rather than loved. “God was conceived of as the Sovereign above the world before whom man appears, not with whom man is to live. God was law to the soul; law was God to man. Righteousness was fulfilling the law. Religion was resolved into the relation of the soul to the law which was at once the unalterable declaration of the Divine Will and the revelation of God’s glory. This ethical conception of the Divine Being as absolute law, as Paul had learned it, was indeed a sublime conception of Deity. Moral Sovereignty, as revealed in the glory of unalterable law, was a grand and awful conception. In his pre-Christian period Paul’s conscience had not learned to walk peacefully with God, the righteous Father; but it stood still and trembled, naked and afraid, before the holy God of Israel.”<sup>1</sup> And Paul’s feelings towards God, assuming that they are here rightly described, may be taken as typical and representative of the theistic ideas that prevailed among the better class of Pharisees in his day. Paul was the last interpreter of God in the Old Dispensation and the first interpreter of the New Dispensation; Saul of Tarsus

<sup>1</sup> See Newman Smyth’s “Christian Ethics,” pp. 155-182.

represents the former while Paul the Apostle represents the latter.

The gradual transformation of this legal idea of God into the conception of him as a holy and all-loving Father was the one great achievement of Christ. Christ took the word "Father," and so charged it with meaning that it has become and must remain the ultimate conception of God—so writes Dr. G. A. Johnston Ross.<sup>1</sup> He found the conception local, and universalised it; tribal, and individualised it; physical, and moralised it. In this last particular he has rendered a service to humanity that is absolutely unique. The quality of the fatherhood which he attributed to God, its perfect combination of mercy and truth, intimacy and elevation, obligation and independence, is his own gift to the world, and is that after all which distinguishes Christianity from other religions. If any one should ask us wherein is Christianity superior to other religions, it is best to reply "In the character of its God." In the entire history of religious thought never before or since has so great a change and achievement been accomplished in so short a time as that wrought by Christ in replacing the traditional and prevalent idea of God with that of the divine Fatherhood in whose nature love was revealed as dominant, if any one attribute could be dominant over all other attributes.

## *2. Progress from an Earthly to a Spiritual Messiah*

But not less marked, indeed in a sense even more marked, was the gradual change that took place in their interpretation of Christ. The prevalent idea was that the Messiah was to be an earthly ruler and establish an earthly kingdom. Their thoughts of him were of the earth earthy, and the very idea of the divine incarnation had to be first created and then developed. They were prepared to see their Messiah work miracles. This was a fitting accompaniment of his work in the establishment of the messianic kingdom. But that he was to be a spiritual and not temporal ruler, and his kingdom a spiritual and not a political and earthly kingdom; that he was to suffer death like other men, that he was not only the

<sup>1</sup> "The God We Trust," p. 27.

Son of Man and the Messiah but really and truly the Son of God, pre-existent as to the past and coequal with the Father in heaven, and perhaps hardest of all to believe, that he was the Redeemer and Saviour of all men and nations just as truly as of themselves—that it was only gradually and progressively that their faith came to comprehend all these cardinal facts and truths concerning the divine-human Christ, the New Testament Scriptures abundantly show.

### *3. The Advent of the Holy Spirit*

The revelation of the personality and deity of the Holy Spirit which took place on the day of Pentecost was not only an expression of progress in the revelation of God, but it was much more—it marked a great epoch, and created a new era in man's expanding and enlarging knowledge of God. What the advent and incarnation are to Christ, the day of Pentecost is to the Holy Spirit—the day of his self-revelation to the world. What the three Synoptic Gospels are to Christ, the book of Acts is to the Holy Spirit. Instead of being titled "The Acts of the Apostles," it has been said, and not without some good reason, that this book might even more appropriately be titled "The Acts of the Holy Spirit." What the Gospel of John is to the person and deity of the Christ by way of an inspired interpretation, that the Apostolic Epistles are to the person and deity of the Holy Spirit. In the revelation of the Holy Spirit, then, which is contained in the book of Acts and also in the Epistles we have an advance over the earliest New Testament revelation of God. An advance even beyond Christ's most precious revelation in his own divine-human person is the revelation of the Third person in the Trinity as he is related to the Father and the Son. Christ prepared for the coming of the Holy Spirit and committed to him the application of the saving benefits of his redeeming work and the execution of his purposes in the establishment of his spiritual kingdom in the world. The completion, therefore, of the progressive revelation of God in the Scriptures is found not in the incarnation of the Son of God in our humanity, nor yet in Christ's revelation of the Fatherhood

of God, but in the personality, deity and work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is pre-eminently the Divine Person with whom we have to deal; and for the finite spirit to be rightly related to the infinite Spirit—the Spirit of the Father and of the Son—is to realise perfectly the ideal of the Christian religion. It is, then, not an empty theological phrase but a statement of a profound reality when we say that we are under the Dispensation of the Holy Spirit.

#### *4. Progress as Reflected in the Literature of the New Testament*

The progressive character of the New Testament revelation of God and his purpose of redemption in and through Christ has been approached and presented from a somewhat different angle by Dr. Thomas Carter, thus:

“The New Testament Scriptures are the outcome of the missionary attitude and activity of early Christianity. They were born out of obedience to the last command, the product of the union of divine fulness and human need. This is ever the genesis of Scripture, the invasion of the human realm of sin and self by the ever-expanding energy of the Spirit of the living God. Starting with the book of Matthew, which sets in the forefront the Jewish genealogy and gives a somewhat narrow channel to the current of our Lord’s life, it passes on through Mark, the Roman Gospel, and Luke, the Greek Gospel, to John, the racial. And in the Acts the graphic tale is continued. A new beginning is made in Jerusalem, only to set in motion a movement that is destined to flow out into the surrounding hills of Judea, pervade Palestine with its beneficent influence, and finally forge its victorious way to the heart of the capital of the empire. The Epistles then take up the great missionary conception incarnate in Christ and bring its wondrous message to bear on the world of human thought, fighting its way through Roman ridicule, Corinthian impurity, Galatian fickleness, Colossian narrowness, and Ephesian idolatry until in the majestic roll of apocalyptic vision the city of God, dwarfing by its celestial magnificence all the greatness and glory of the nations and kings and tribes of earth, like a newly arrayed bride comes down out of heaven, having ‘the

glory of God for its light, and the nations of them that are saved to walk in it.'

"Look at the first verse of the New Testament and contrast its scope and outlook with that of the last. That first verse reads: 'The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.' That last verse reads: 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all the saints.' In the light of these two statements—one narrow, national, earthly, the other as broad as the sea of humanity and as heavenly as the grace of God in Christ can make it—who can deny that the New Testament, though born of occasions many and varied, though fragmentary and frequently local, still is permeated by the Spirit of God, illustrative of the mind of Christ, and in its constant answering to the ever-growing demands of the Church proves itself to be the breathing of the Holy Ghost?"<sup>1</sup>

#### *5. The Ever-enlarging Conception of God and of the Divine-human Christ*

Christ said to the men of his generation that after the days of his flesh were ended, they were going to do greater things than he was then doing, and he has richly redeemed his promise. It was by the aid of the Holy Spirit whom he promised to send as a divine guide, paraclete and ever-present helper, that these greater works were to be accomplished. If Christ had continued longer in the flesh with his disciples—say ten, twenty, thirty years—his physical body would have become more and more a hindrance and not a help to his highest influence over them and to his most effective work through them. It was only after the human Christ became to their faith the ethical and spiritual and purely divine Christ, and all bodily associations and limitations were removed, that their ethical and spiritual efficiency became greatest. Christ, therefore, ought to be, and is, to us a greater and diviner Christ than the early disciples knew, or could know, because we have seen his marvellous doings in and through Spirit-filled men for the more than eighteen centuries that have elapsed since they lived and died. Surely we ought to reinterpret Christ

<sup>1</sup> "The Story of the New Testament."

in our day and build him bigger mansions in our minds and hearts, because we can see more of God in him and in his work than they could see who lived with him in the days of the flesh. That the Christ of the twentieth century has been proven by his nineteen centuries of achievement in the world to be a greater and diviner Christ than the early disciples knew is witnessed by every page of every history of the Christian Church and of Christian civilisation that has been written in the last hundred years, if it is faithful to the facts of history.

The purpose of all reinterpretations of Christ by those who have caught the vision of his greatness is to awaken their fellow men to a fresh and equally profound conviction that he is the very revelation of the love and power of God for the salvation of the world. As Christ was the incarnation of God so are men, his followers, to incarnate him. And as the incarnate Christ, though revealing God in the words he spoke concerning him as no words of prophet ever spoken before had revealed him, yet revealed and interpreted him more perfectly in his own life and character, so is it true of his followers that their truest and most effective interpretation and reproduction of the Christ is not in spoken words, but in living the Christian life and in exhibiting the Christian character. Men may doubt and deny the God of your creed, but your life and your deeds are arguments that cannot be doubted or denied.

It is now more than a third of a century ago that a distinguished English theologian declared that the most distinctive and determinative element in modern theology is what we may term a new feeling for Christ. That "feeling for Christ" is just as strong to-day as it was when these words were uttered. Indeed the "feeling for Christ" is the one thing that is "new" in every age—it is always new. And this is because Jesus has left little if anything really new to be said concerning God or concerning any of the great truths of religion, which means our duties towards God, or of ethics, which means our duties towards our fellow men. What Christ said is so fraught with meaning, is so abidingly virile and so charged with dynamic moral force that it remains eternally new. A modern philosopher once declared that the ancients had stolen all his

original ideas. The extent to which Christ has anticipated all the best and greatest thoughts of the theologians and moral philosophers and sociologists that have spoken or written since he lived proves at once the limitations of the human mind and the marvellousness of the mind of the great Teacher.

#### 6. *The Finality of the Revelation of Jesus Not Inconsistent with Continued Progress*

It thus appears that even in the short period covered by the literature of the New Testament there is traceable a marked progress in the interpretation of God as he is revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. When we think of the meager conception of Christ entertained by the twelve apostles at the time they were first called to be disciples and companions of our Lord, of how slowly and yet how surely that conception expanded as they listened to his words, witnessed his works, watched his life from day to day, and his spirit "with less of earth in it than heaven"—thought about him, talked first with him and then about him, reflected, interpreted, revised their opinions ever and anon, went backward at times as well as forward, confessed at Cæsarea Philippi that he was "The Son of the living God," then forsook him and fled at the time of trial, then came back into faith, and then, stunned by his death, lost heart and gave up—then, restored, reheartened, and reinforced by his resurrection from the dead, they came thus at length to interpret him in terms of Deity, and going forth in that faith undaunted, to live and die, they laid the foundations of the mightiest empire that has ever been established on the earth. And yet we have gone far beyond even these apostles in our conception of the greatness of God and the divineness of Christ, and why should we not?—for we interpret Christ and the Father whom he revealed in the light of all that bears witness to God's presence and power in the earth in nineteen centuries of human history, a history which, however, marred by the sins of men and nations, has never failed to reveal God as the Father and Christ as the Saviour of men. And not only is the conception of God, and of the divine-human Christ, higher, greater, and that means truer, than

ever before,—but there are more people than ever before who believe in the one and only true God and in his Son Jesus Christ.

But while men may and should come to interpret the Heavenly Father and the divine-human Christ in terms of a higher and larger faith growing out of a progressive and ever-enlarging experience, the revelation which Christ has given the world of God will never be surpassed, and this because, from our point of view, it cannot be surpassed. It is, therefore, final, and final because it carries the principle of endless progress within it. "The finality of Jesus is to be found," says Dr. John A. Rice, "in the ultimate things among which he lived and moved and had his Being; in the viewpoint, attitude, and spirit which were his, and the power with which he lived out spiritual realities. For he is indeed the contemporary of all ages, the citizen of all climes, the ideal of all races, the inspiration of all classes, the brother of all men. His God must be to us final because we cannot conceive one higher than our Father in heaven. His conception of man as the child of God, heir to all the riches of the Father, must be held supreme since we can conceive none beyond; his ethics, the science of brotherly love, and his type of society, a universal brotherhood in which each lives in fellowship with the Father and in fraternal service to others, must be accepted as the goal of all our yearnings and social efforts until a better can be found. His method of redemption by love alone is rapidly coming to the fore as our only hope for the lost. His method of worship—a free spirit worshipping the Father in spirit and truth—cannot be surpassed, nor can we get beyond his outlook upon the future life: the righteous risen to eternal fellowship in the kingdom of the undefiled, the unrighteous left out. He is the divine-human goal upon whom all the lines of progress of the Old Testament converge, in whom alone all the great ideas of the Old Testament—in themselves incomplete—find fulfilment. Nowhere else do we reach such a satisfying sense of finality as in Jesus. Above Him we can see nothing."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "The Old Testament in the Life of To-day."

To show the difference between a progressive and a non-progressive religion Dr. Harry Fosdick<sup>1</sup> compares and contrasts Mohammedanism and the religion of the Bible in some of their aspects as follows:

"In the Bible one can find all the ideas and customs which Mohammedanism has approved and for which it now is hated: its oriental deity decreeing fates, its use of force to destroy unbelievers, its patriarchal polygamy, and its slave systems. All these things, from which we now send missionaries to convert Mohammedans, are in our Bible, but in the Bible they are not final. They are ever being superseded. The revelation is progressive. The idea of God grows from oriental kingship to compassionate fatherhood; the use of force gives way to the appeals of love; polygamy is displaced by monogamy; slavery never openly condemned, even when the New Testament closes, is being undermined by ideas which, like dynamite, in the end will blast to pieces its foundations. We are continually running upon passages like this: 'It was said to them of old time, . . . but I say unto you;' 'God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son.' 'The times of ignorance therefore God overlooked; but now he commandeth men that they should all everywhere repent;' and over the doorway out of the New Testament into the Christian centuries that followed is written this inscription: 'The spirit of truth . . . shall guide you into all the truth.' In a word, finality in the Koran is *behind* —it lies in the treasured concepts of 600 A.D.—but finality in the Bible is *ahead*. We are moving toward it. It is too great for us yet to apprehend. Our best thoughts are thrown out in its direction but they do not exhaust its meaning.

'Our little systems have their day;  
They have their day and cease to be;  
They are but broken lights of thee,  
And thou, O Lord, art more than they.'

"Such is the exultant outlook of a Christian believer on a progressive world."

<sup>1</sup> "Christianity and Progress," pp. 214-15.



CHAPTER TWELVE

THE DIVINE INSPIRATION OF THE  
SCRIPTURES



## CHAPTER TWELVE

### THE DIVINE INSPIRATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

To say that the Bible is the most widely read book in the literature of the world, is to state a most commonplace and well-known fact. It is the only book that has been translated, even in part, into all the languages of mankind. The primary motive in making an alphabet and written forms for some of these languages was to print the Bible and impart to men a knowledge of its contents.

And yet the Bible has always been under fire of the unbelieving world, and doubtless always will be. It is not to be regretted that it is so. Criticism causes it to be more diligently read and more correctly interpreted by those who devoutly believe in its divine inspiration and authority. But the critical study of the Bible during the past half century has had this notable characteristic—namely, it has been conducted not so much by unbelievers and sceptics as by its friends, those who reverence it and believe in its inspiration, and in its divine authority in moral and spiritual matters. This means that Biblical criticism is, or is at least intended to be, constructive and not destructive of faith in the Bible as the Word of God.

#### I

##### WHAT IS BIBLICAL INSPIRATION?

There is no feature of present-day religious thought and discussion that has attracted such widespread attention and so sharply divided modern Bible students and theologians into opposing schools of thought as the subject of Biblical inspiration. The application to the Bible of the principles of literary and historical criticism that are applied to all other types of

ancient literature, to determine when they were written, who wrote them, and to what extent they are accurate and trustworthy statements of fact, has resulted in what is called the higher criticism of the Bible. What is called lower criticism consists of a determination of the original Hebrew and Greek text found in the ancient manuscripts that furnish the basis and source of our modern versions of the Bible. The higher criticism of the Bible has brought to light the fact that two very different conceptions of inspiration prevail in the Church; and it is important that we give as clear a statement as possible to both views—the one being the long prevalent doctrine of traditional theology, and the other the view held by an ever-increasing number of modern Biblical scholars.

### *1. The Traditional Doctrine of Biblical Inspiration*

The long prevalent traditional doctrine of Biblical inspiration has been stated by various theologians of the Church in such terms as the following:

“Every book of the Bible, every chapter of it, every verse of it, every word of it, every syllable of it, every letter of it, is the direct utterance of the Most High, supreme, absolute, faultless, unerring.” “Every syllable of it is just what it would be had God spoken from heaven without the intervention of any human agent.” “God presided over the sacred writers in their entire work of writing, with the design and effect of making that writing an errorless record.” “A proved error in Scripture contradicts not only our doctrine, but the Bible claims, and therefore its inspiration in making those claims.” “Chronological and geographical details, as well as matters of physical science mentioned in the Bible, must in every portion of every book be held to have been stated with infallible accuracy. This infallibility and authority attach as well to the verbal expression in which the revelation is conveyed, as to the revelation itself.” “Scripture is infallible truth, free from all error; each and everything contained in it is absolute truth, be it doctrine, morals, history, chronology, topography, proper names.” These quotations represent the views of such writers as Dean Burgon, Gaussen, Turrentin,

Hodge, Lee, and others,<sup>1</sup> who have written in defence of the traditional Church doctrine. They call their doctrine that of "plenary inspiration," but it is usually designated, by those who oppose it, as the "verbal" or "mechanical theory" of inspiration.

Dr. Shedd, a strong advocate for plenary inspiration, says in words which we here condense: "The fact that the Bible contains a human element furnishes one of the principal arguments urged by those who assert the fallibility of Scripture. This objection overlooks the fact that the human element in the Bible is so modified by the divine element with which it is blended as to differ from the merely ordinary human. The written Word is indeed divine-human, like the incarnate Word. But the human element in Scripture, like the human nature in our Lord, is preserved from the defects of the common human and becomes the pure and ideal human. The human mind alone and by itself is fallible, but when inspired and moved by the Holy Spirit it becomes infallible, because it is no longer alone and by itself. When the Holy Spirit inspires a human mind, though this human mind is not freed from sin, yet it is freed from all error on the points involved. It is no longer the fallibly human, but is infallible upon all subjects respecting which it is inspired to teach. The history which it relates, the physics which it sets forth, the chronology which it presents, are all alike free from error. When the Holy Spirit selects a particular person—Moses, Samuel, David, Isaiah, John, Paul—as his organ for communicating religious truth to mankind, he first makes him infallible, though he does not make him sinless. Consequently the human element in the prophecy or the history or the dogma which this inspired person gives to the Church is not a fallible element, because it is blended with the divine element of inspiration and kept free from human error."

I do not know of any clearer or stronger statement of the

<sup>1</sup> Dr. R. A. Torrey, a popular modern evangelist, defends this doctrine of inspiration: "Remember that the Bible is verbally inspired; that is, that the Holy Spirit, the unerring Spirit of God, led the Bible writers in the choice of every word they wrote that exactly expressed what was in the mind of God." ("Importance and Value of Bible Study," p. 70.)

traditional doctrine of Biblical inspiration than this given by Dr. Shedd in his "Dogmatic Theology."

## 2. *The Modern Scholar's View of Biblical Inspiration*

There is an increasing number of Bible students and writers throughout the Christian world who believe this to be an indefensible view of inspiration, in that it claims more than the Bible claims for itself, and is calculated to result in producing more doubts than it removes as to the inspiration and authority of the Bible. According to this view the discovery of occasional errors in the Bible—for example, of chronology, geography, history, and the like—which may be traced to the distinctly human element in the Bible is a thing rather to be expected than otherwise, and it is unwise to make the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures, as a revelation of God's will in matters of moral and spiritual truth, to stand or fall with the claims of absolute inerrancy that are made in their behalf by the advocates of the former view.

In the New Testament there are to be found two hundred and seventy-five quotations from the Old Testament, of which number only sixty-three agree exactly with the Hebrew Old Testament. In thirty-seven of these quotations the New Testament follows the Septuagint which is different in varying degrees from the Hebrew. In seventy-six instances there are slight variations from the Hebrew, and in ninety-nine cases the quotations vary more or less from both the Hebrew and the Septuagint. While the facts to which attention is here called do not in any way affect the substantial trustworthiness of either the Old or the New Testament records, it will be seen at once that they have a serious bearing on the doctrine of plenary inspiration so far as it claims absolute inerrancy for the Bible, even to the very words used.

The author of "Present-Day Theology" may be selected to speak for the modern scholar's view—and he is not a radical critic, but one who speaks with moderation, as the following words will show:—

"Some theologians begin with the *a priori* principle that the

Bible must be absolutely inerrant, and boldly assert that this is the case, not only in matters which pertain to the one great purpose of revelation, but in all matters whatsoever. Now we can easily conceive that it might have been so. But we have no right to assume that it is so until we have examined the facts. If the facts show that this was not the case, which, let us ask, honours God the most, to accept his method of making a Bible as the best, or insist that he followed the method which we think best? It seems a very good and pious thing to insist that the Bible is absolutely without error; but nothing is good or pious which is contrary to facts, and nothing has done more harm to the cause of Christianity than the well-meaning but mistaken defences which have been employed. Now a careful examination of the facts shows that inspiration did not render the sacred writers infallible in everything, however infallible they may have been in that for which they were inspired. Let us look at the subject in detail, so far as our time will permit. . . .<sup>1</sup> Such are some of the facts. The sphere in which they lie is not that of divine revelation. They belong to the circumference, not to the centre. Judged by every true criterion, they are unimportant. They do not contradict inspiration; rather, they are limitations incidental to inspiration. For my part, I do not regard them as difficulties in the way of the Bible, but rather as recommendations to its acceptance. I can see how the Bible can much better accomplish its purpose by not offering us infallibility in nonessentials, how thus God has made it a more human and intelligible book, and has guarded us against that worship of the letter which blinds men to the spirit."

### 3. *The Two Doctrines as Related to God*

It is the bearing of these two theories or doctrines on the conception and character of the God of the Bible that we are especially concerned in. The traditional doctrine of inspiration holds, as we have seen, that the Bible is so truly and essentially the very and altogether accurate word of God that whatever it represents God as saying, or doing, or ordering

<sup>1</sup> The author here cites numerous passages of Scripture that are irreconcilable with the claim of verbal inspiration and Biblical inerrancy. See "Present Day Theology" (pp. 105-108) by L. F. Stearns.

done, must be accepted as so true that the character of God must be made to conform to the Biblical statements. The modern scholar's view is that the absolutely perfect character of God as Christ has revealed him to us is the one settled and fixed fact in our faith; and if there is found any passage of Scripture in the Old or the New Testament that represents God as saying, or doing, or ordering done, anything that does not accord with the character Christ gives him, then that particular Scripture must be considered either as an erroneous statement, or as a true statement of a misinterpretation of God on the part either of the writer, or of those for whom he speaks. Traditional Theology contends for the absolute accuracy of the Bible, no matter what it says, regarding it as the infallible word of God. The modern scholar's view leads him to contend first of all and above all for the absolute perfection of the character and doings of God, and says that if in the Bible, anything is attributed to God which we are bound to think is inconsistent with his character as it has been revealed in and by Christ, it is to be regarded as an error or a misinterpretation of him. It is important that we understand that the modern Bible scholar is not for a moment trying to destroy confidence in the Bible, but he is insisting that we must have confidence in the absolute perfection of God, and that whatever doctrine of Biblical inspiration best accords with that fundamental fact of faith, must be the true doctrine. That some things are attributed to God in the Old Testament which it is difficult to reconcile with his absolute moral perfection has been a source of religious perplexity to well-nigh every thoughtful Bible reader. The modern scholar's view of the Bible as a divine-human book, in making it possible to explain certain moral difficulties as misinterpretations of God, has brought relief to many Bible students who, as between an absolutely perfect God and a fallible Bible, on the one hand, and an infallible Bible attributing moral imperfection to God, on the other hand, cannot hesitate for a moment as to which of the two alternatives to choose. Of all doctrines of religion the most fundamental is the absolute moral perfection of God.

These then are the two conceptions of Biblical inspiration between which all Bible readers must choose. The traditional theological definition of inspiration makes it to be such a divine influence of the Holy Spirit upon the Biblical writers as secured them against the possibility of a mistake of any kind whatsoever—in matters of history, chronology, science, and the like, no less than in matters purely moral and spiritual. Under this view, any mistake whatsoever that could be pointed out in the historical or chronological or scientific statements made in the Bible would be a serious and even vital matter. The tendency of modern theological thought is to regard the distinctly moral and spiritual elements in the Bible as those which it was the chief end of divine revelation to supply, and which it was the main purpose of inspiration to protect from hurtful error. The Bible contains a human as well as a divine element, and everything human is liable to err. The fact that it is inspired, instead of securing for it immunity from being subjected to the tests of literary and historical criticism such as are applied to other documents, should rather make us feel that it is all the more important that it should be tested.

#### 4. *The Bible a Divine-Human Book*

There is a divine-human Person, a divine-human Book, and a divine-human Institution. In the person of Christ, the divine and human, God and man, were perfectly united, without mixture or confusion. The human nature of Jesus was as "very man" as if it had sustained no vital union with the eternal Logos; and as peccability was an essential element of man's nature as a free moral agent, we think it follows inevitably that the human Jesus could have erred. But, in the exercise of his freedom, he did not err, and herein is the glory of his triumph over temptation and his example to us, not that it was impossible for him to sin, but that he could sin, but did not.

In regard to the divine-human Institution, the collective body of believers, that we call the Church, how is it? Of the Church we must say that, while it is possible for it not to err, yet, as a matter of fact, it has erred and does err (at least such is the Protestant doctrine, though the papal doctrine is that

the Church is infallible and cannot err—meaning by the Church, of course, themselves and themselves only). The Holy Spirit, though incarnate within the Church, and though working in it and through it, does not prevent the human element in the Church from error; and the papal doctrine of the infallibility of the Church is not only contradicted by the facts of history, but brings the Church under criticism and into a disrepute which is aggravated and made ridiculous by these high and unwarranted claims of infallibility—claims that are nowhere made for the Church by Christ or the apostles, though they call it the pillar and ground of the truth. Yet in spite of the fact that the Church is liable to err, and has erred, and does err, the Holy Spirit works through it and makes it the accredited interpreter to mankind of truth pertaining to salvation. Not only does God work through a fallible Church, but, as the Church is made up of individuals, he works through fallible and imperfect men and women. If God had deigned to work only in and through human beings that are perfect and free from error, he would never have done any work in the world except through the man Christ Jesus. As to the divine-human Person, then, we say that he could err but did not err, and as to the divine-human Institution we say it could err and has erred.

How now about the divine-human Book that comes, as it were, between the Christ and the Church? Can the Bible and its inspired writers be in error, or did the divine element so dominate and override the human in its production as to render the latter incapable of error, as Dr. Shedd claims? Have the inspired writers erred, and does the Bible contain mistakes? "Well, if the Bible does contain mistakes," the modern scholar says, "I am not therefore going to say that its writers could not be divinely inspired, and that it cannot be an authoritative and divinely revealed expression of the will of God. For I am sure that, if it does contain mistakes, these mistakes represent and emanate from the human and not the divine elements in the Bible, and are wholly attributable to fallible men and not to the infallible Spirit. I am now prepared to read my Bible without any embarrassment when I have reached this

mental position—a position attended with much less embarrassment than I should be in if I felt that the discovery of any errors would prove that the writers could not be inspired and the Bible could not be God's book. And if perchance I find, as I think I shall, that the Bible contains few if any errors that affect in the least its trustworthiness as an expression of divine truth concerning the redeeming will of God, I shall be all the more pleased with the result reached. Whether the Bible, then, contains any mistakes or not, is simply a question of fact to be decided through examination by competent judges just as all matters pertaining to historical and literary criticism are decided."

## II

### PROOFS OF INSPIRATION

Instead of saying that the Bible is inspired, and therefore, because of that fact, it cannot have any mistakes of any kind in it, let us rather be prepared to say: the Bible has been thoroughly tested as to its truth, and is being continually tested, and this testing has proved that it contains such revelations of moral and spiritual truth as are found in no other book, and such a lofty conception of God as is found in no other religion—and for this reason we claim that it furnishes the most effective proof possible that it is a divinely inspired volume. Certain it is that it is only in that respect in which the Bible can, under any and all criticism, be proved to be a true and trustworthy book, that it can claim to be divinely inspired. As to whether or not inspiration secured the Biblical writers from the possibility of mistakes in every sphere into which they incidentally entered (e.g., history, chronology, science, etc.), there is difference of opinion among theologians; but their trustworthiness as revealers of God's will in all questions of an ethical and spiritual nature, when their writings are properly interpreted, is a matter upon which all schools of theological Christian thought may be said to be agreed; and this is what needs most to be emphasised in our day.

*1. Do the Scriptures Claim to be Inspired?*

“All Scripture,” says St. Paul, “is given by inspiration of God.” By “inspiration” we mean that attribute of the Scriptures by virtue of which they possess a religious and moral value that attaches to no other volume, and in consequence of which they have an authority in the realm of moral and religious truth that belongs to no other book. How did the Bible get this unique value and authority? That it claims to be the Word of God in a sense true of no other book only in part explains it. Christ and the apostles regarded the Old Testament as the Word of the Lord, and the Christian Church has from the beginning appealed to the New Testament as a divinely inspired rule of faith and practice. “The word of the Lord came unto me, saying”—is an expression of frequent occurrence in the messages of the Old Testament prophets, and occasionally there is a divine command to write down in a book the thing revealed or commanded. The New Testament, and also the later Old Testament Scriptures, bear witness to the reverence and care with which the Church received, preserved, and transmitted the written records handed down from the past, and this because they were believed to be divinely inspired. And the antecedent expectation that a divinely inspired book will give us all needful knowledge about God is one that will not bring disappointment to the devout reader, who is seeking guidance and help in finding God.

*2. The Method of Inspiration and Revelation*

We can believe that, in varying degrees, patriarchs, prophets and apostles were divinely inspired, and that God made revelations to them—and this we can believe without understanding exactly how he did so, whether visibly and audibly, or inaudibly and inwardly. It suffices for us to see and know by the result of the revelation that it is altogether worthy to justify the claim being made for it that it is of divine origination.

“It was no audible voice, it was no printed page,” says Dr. P. T. Forsythe, “that came to Abraham as the voice of the Lord. It was an inward inspiration; and he very nearly

committed an awful crime by his inability at first to distinguish the false in his impulse from the true. It was an inward and poetic vision that passed before the spirit of Isaiah as he saw the city of the Lord exalted on Zion, and the nations flocking thither with their homage. But only part of that vision was true. The precise form of its imagery, which I do not doubt the prophet himself believed would be realised, never has been and never will be actual. The vision of Paul, again, at Damascus, to many minds was not an outward and ocular vision at all. No man could see it but himself. It was subjective. It was to his own eye that the form of the Crucified appeared. It was in his ear alone, as in Abraham's case, that the strange words rang. But I have just as little doubt that the vision was real, that it was not a mere projection, and not a mere hallucination rising from a morbid, nervous condition or a sunstroke. If these things played any part, they were but concomitants. I think the revelation was real, and that Christ did speak to Paul, with all, and more than all, the reality and force he would have had if he had stood forth in the sight of the Apostle's companions, and made His words audible to them as well. This was a case, not of imagination, but of revelation. It was something more than a mere projection from the Apostle's interior. It was inward, but it was objective none the less. And it was not imaginative, it was spiritual reality of the kind that changes life and history.”<sup>1</sup>

### 3. *The Practical Proof of Inspiration*

The practical proof of the inspiration of Holy Scriptures—as Dr. G. P. Fisher has so clearly shown in his “Grounds of Theistic and Christian Belief”—is found in the life-giving power that abides in it and remains undiminished from age to age in all the mutations of literature and amid the diverse types and advancing stages of culture and civilisation. While the Bible is at once the fountain of spiritual light and life, the prime source of religious knowledge, and the rule of faith and guide of conduct among Christians, it is important to remember that the Scriptures are the product of the Church.

<sup>1</sup> “Christ on Parnassus.”

They do not create the community of believers; but the community of believers, on the other hand, creates them. As the Gospels were for the Church, so they were from the Church. The Old Testament Church, or community of believers, existed not only for centuries but for millenniums before there was any collection of written Scripture documents, and the Old Testament dispensation had well-nigh closed before it had its completed Scriptures as they now exist. And several generations of Christian believers had come and gone, and the Christian Church was far on its winning and widening way before it had discovered, accepted and collected the Apostolic writings now known as the New Testament.

The fundamental reality, therefore, is not the Bible, it is the Kingdom of God—it is the society of believers in God. This truth cannot be too greatly emphasised. Literary questions having to do with the authorship of books—as, for example, whether a book be simple or composite, and whether traditional impressions as to authorship are well founded; questions having to do also with the correctness of the text which has been transmitted to us; questions as to the order of succession in the stages of development through which the community of God has passed; questions as to the faultless accuracy of details in historical narratives—these are no longer felt to be of vital moment. They are not points on which the Christian religion stands or falls; and the timidity which springs out of the idea of Christianity as exclusively a book religion, every line in whose sacred books is clothed with the preternatural sanctity ascribed by Mohammedan devotees to their sacred writings, is dissipated. The Christian believer, as long as fundamental verities and the foundations on which they stand are unassailed, is no longer disturbed by the unveiling of the human factor in the origination of the Scriptures, and by finding that it played a more extensive part than was once supposed. The treasure is not lost because it is distinctly perceived to be held in earthen vessels.<sup>1</sup>

There are two ways, says Professor James Denney, in which

<sup>1</sup> See Fisher's "Grounds of Theistic and Christian Belief," pp. 322-336, for the fuller development of this "practical" proof of Biblical inspiration.

the Bible can be read. It can be read with an historical or with a spiritual interest. In the former case we read history, in the latter case we make history; in the former case we seek to know what others have thought of God, in the latter what we are to think of God. Professor Denney says:—

“The historian is concerned with the differences in the Bible. Even when he is aware of a unity which overrules them his attention is concentrated on the sundry times and divers manners in which this unity is revealed. When he admits that God has spoken, his aim is to distinguish as clearly as possible the many parts and many ways in which he has done so; his interest is set not on what God is saying but on what, in circumstances which can never be exactly repeated, God said long ago.

“This, however, is not the point of view of the ordinary Bible reader, nor is it that of the Church. Their interest in the Bible is spiritual and is, therefore, concerned with its unity, not with the distinctions in it; they hearken not because of what God said to the fathers but because of what he is saying to themselves. They do not aim at reaching this through any intellectual process exercised upon the results attained by historical study; they count on enjoying it with an immediacy like that of the senses. They open their Bibles and expect to see the Light of God as directly as they see the sunshine when they open their eyes in the morning; and they are confident too that they do see it.”

#### 4. *The Internal Evidence of Inspiration*

While it is true that miracles and prophecies, what the older theologians called “external evidences,” have lost much of their evidential value in presenting the divine claims of the Bible and Christianity to unbelievers of this generation, what are called the “internal evidences” or the moral arguments are more relied upon and more emphasised than ever before. This latter argument emphasises the fact that the Bible is that book which presents the noblest conception of religious truth anywhere found in literature. Its doctrine, for example, of the unity and spirituality of God, its exaltation of the attributes of holiness and love, its conception of the personality and

fatherhood of God; its presentation of God as an ethical Being who loves righteousness in those who worship him and exalts it far above mere ritual and ceremonial worship—such a doctrine of God, it is claimed, is self-evidencing, and the book that brings to man such a conception of the divine Being does not need miracles, it is said, in order to command the respect, the reverence, and the faith of men. The same is true of the ethical system which everywhere characterises the Bible, especially the New Testament; the emphasis that is everywhere placed upon righteousness and purity, upon justice and love; its condemnation of sin and wrong of every kind and in every person. The sermon on the mount, the twelfth chapter of Romans, the thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians—these and other presentations of the ethics of the Bible, again, are “self-evidencing”; they need no miracles to prove that they are from God and are an expression of his nature and his will.

Man's duties to God, to his fellow man, and to himself have found such harmonious expression in the Bible as to create the presumption that God must have inspired it. The ethics of the Old Testament was the purest the world had ever seen, but not until the coming of Christ was it possible to have a perfect system of ethics. He was at once the perfect teacher of ethics and a perfect example of ethics in his daily life. Christian ethics points to Christ as its perfect model. There is no vice which the ethics of the Bible does not condemn, and no virtue which it does not command and enjoin. “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” “Love is the fulfilling of the law.” “Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.” “Overcome evil with good.” What being less than God could thus see that all human duties may be resolved into love, and that perfect love secures perfect obedience to every law? The power that can alone secure the perfect discharge of every moral duty must be planted within. External laws can never secure this result, no matter how minutely expressed and rigidly enforced. If the Bible had no other proof of a divine element within it, appeal could be confidently made to the ethical system which is embodied within its teachings, as fully estab-

lishing the fact of its containing a revelation of the divine Mind.

Few sentences have ever been written concerning the Bible that express a more rational ground of faith in it or a better proof of its divine inspiration than the often-quoted words of Coleridge: "In the Bible there is more that *finds* me than I have experienced in all other books put together; the words of the Bible find me at greater depths of my being; and whatever *finds* me brings with it an irresistible evidence of its having proceeded from the Holy Spirit." And no less wise and worthy to be quoted are the following words of the eminent scholar and theologian of Scotland, Thomas Erskine: "The value of the Bible, according to my reason and conscience, consists in what it contains—in the truth which I find in it—not in the manner in which it was composed. . . . It seems to me most important to understand the place which the Scriptures really occupy, that so we may make the use of them which they were intended to serve and be delivered from any superstitious feeling about them. This is specially needed here in Scotland, where a belief in the Bible is often substituted for faith in God, and a man is considered religious, not because he walks with God in his spirit, but because he acknowledges and maintains the verbal inspiration of the sacred canon. I have seen people brought up in this way who would have felt their whole faith in spiritual things annihilated by the discovery of any contradiction or inaccuracy in the Gospel history. A faith of this kind which rests on ignorance and is dispelled by knowledge, is certainly not the kind of faith which we should desire either for ourselves or for others. . . . But while I believe that ninety-nine out of a hundred of the religious people of Scotland believe the verbal inspiration of the Bible, and would have their faith shaken to pieces by such facts as your friend has here adduced,—and while I should like to see them disabused—nevertheless I should like for this to be done in a way that would transfer their faith from the letter to the spirit, and not destroy their faith altogether. . . . The character of God as a teaching Father who eternally desires and seeks the holiness of his reasonable creatures seems to me to be the great

revelation of the Bible and the true meaning of Christianity. . . . This is the pearl of great price which when a man has found he needs not that any should tell him its value, for he knows it and feels it; he does not need any evidence, any other evidence, that this revelation of God is the true revelation."

It is thus the moral and spiritual qualities of the Bible that are accounted by the apologists of this day and generation as of more value than many miracles, and hence these are the attributes of the Bible most prized and most emphasised in our day by readers and students who find it a pathway to God. There are many who are ready to take their stand with Coleridge and say: Let those who can and may find comfort and strength for their faith in the physical miracles and predictive prophecies of the Scriptures; but, as for me, it is because the Bible finds me, finds me at deeper depths and meets my highest moral and spiritual needs as does no other book, that I believe it to be divinely inspired.

### 5. *Some Witnesses to the Word*

There could perhaps be no stronger argument adduced in proof of the divine inspiration of the sacred Scriptures than to collect and arrange in proper form the answers that would be given by Bible readers to a question propounded to all that should read like this:—Why do you believe the Bible to be the Word of God? The answers given would reflect to a large extent the theological point of view entertained by the individual answering the question. But while the reasons given would be very different, each one would doubtless assign a valid reason for his faith in the Bible as the Word of God, while all of them taken together could not fail to constitute a strong argument in proof of what might reasonably be called the divine inspiration of the sacred volume. This proves that that which determines its moral and spiritual value is not a matter involved in the dispute between theologians as to whether an inspired book may or may not contain mistakes.

Some churchmen speak with the vision and voice of a prophet; others are best described as echoes and transmitters

of tradition—which fact, however, by no means indicates that their faith is not as sincere as it would be if they had broken with traditional views. When the late Bishop J. M. Thoburn of India retired from the active duties of the Episcopal office because of age, Dr. James M. Buckley, Editor of the *New York Christian Advocate*, paid him the following personal tribute:—

“There has never been a man like unto him in the Methodist Episcopal Church, for the purpose to which he devoted his life. With simplicity mingled with sagacity; with straightforward English, and yet at times, under inspiration reaching the spirit and the words of the ancient prophets, but more frequently of the apostle John, he has persuaded us when he could not convince, and convinced us when he could not persuade. Consequently he had his way, which he believed was God’s way.”

This eminent missionary Bishop was a great Bible student, and not long before he died he wrote as follows concerning the subject of Biblical inspiration:—

“The inspiration of the Bible as a whole cannot be made to depend upon the verbal or incidental accuracy of each and every event which finds mention in its pages any more than a modern preacher’s call can be made to depend upon the knowledge of grammar and history. A thousand times it has happened that present-day preachers whose lips have been touched with living coals from the altar in the skies have made blunders in historical, scientific, or literary references; but these blunders do not even touch the question of the Spirit’s call to them, or of their fidelity as messengers of the living God. . . . Not since the days of Luther has there been more need of forbearance, toleration, and absolutely free inquiry than at the present hour. Never since the time of Moses has the ark of God been in less actual danger, and never has the Leader of Israel been more manifestly present in the van of his militant host than in this year of our Lord. This is no time for raising cries of alarm, for predicting disaster, or for putting marks on men to indicate that they are unsound in faith. That man is most orthodox who has most of the Christ-life in his heart and best illustrates it in his daily walk.”

Scarcely less apostolic in his faith and ministry was the late Bishop James W. Bashford, who gave his life, after his election to the Episcopal office, almost wholly to China. He was a great Bible reader; and he read and interpreted the Bible from the modern scholar's point of view. Here is what his biographer has to say about his method of reading and interpreting the Bible:

"Every year he read the Bible through, marking passages which met the need of the time, jotting down his reflections upon the margin. His journal reveals the depth and the sanity of his devotion and his constant dependence upon the Bible for spiritual food. His habit of daily Bible reading is illuminating. He read the Bible with the most reverent thoughtfulness. To him the Book was never a fetish on the one hand, nor, on the other, a mere textbook of religion. The Scriptures were the channel of his communion with God, the food upon which his inner life fed. The margins of his Bibles were covered with notes which reveal the yearning search which he was making continually for spiritual light and leading. He marked certain passages which were associated with important occasions or unusual experiences in his life. After reading the Bible through for 1905, his notebook entry is: 'To-day I finished reading through the Bible for 1905. I feel the folly of the contention of the critics. The Bible has mistakes and is partly, indeed wholly, human, as to the agency through which it comes to us, and bears over and over again the marks of its human agents. On the other hand, its divine power manifests itself in the life of each one who will obey it. The Book never meant so much to me as it does to-day.'"

Rev. Dr. H. Hastings Rashdall, Dean of Carlisle, and one of the most brilliant and representative scholars and theologians of the Church of England, gives the following high estimate of what modern science and Biblical scholarship have done with and for the conception of God as he is revealed in the Old Testament, and for the clearer and fuller revelation of him by Jesus Christ:—

"I believe that modern science and the historical study of the Bible have given us, not only truer but higher and more spiritually helpful ideas about human life than the beliefs which are being outlived. And not only so, but the new truth, so far from over-shadowing or supplanting what was really valuable in the traditions of the past, has been the means of helping us to understand and appreciate better than ever before that great central revelation which God has once for all made of himself in our Lord Jesus Christ. I am fully persuaded that many of the changes which have in the course of the last century or so passed over human thought do not merely represent an advance from the point of view of science and history, but tend to give us higher and nobler ideas about God, about Christ, about the meaning and purpose of human life than those which they have superseded."

A few years ago Dr. John Watson ("Ian Maclaren") prepared a course of lectures on the Bible titled "God's Message to the Human Soul." He died before delivering them. In this volume he says:—

"As you travel down Old Testament history you may find yourself sometimes in strange byways, but sooner or later you are brought face to face with God. The writers are intent upon one thing, and that is righteousness; they are ever seeking for one Person, and that is God. There is not only a progress, but it is a progress upwards; from the valley the path climbs the hillside, till it reaches the finer and rarer air of the Gospels, where we are living in the outer court of eternity and at the gate of heaven. The innumerable details of the Book are only its body; the living soul of the Book is religion, the fellowship of man with God. We lay aside the history which is but the stalk and the leaf of the plant; we garner the grain, which is the revelation of God. One supreme purpose governs and illuminates, invigorates and glorifies the Bible, and that is its moral and spiritual truths. These are the things that make the Bible to be the world's one supreme Book of religion, and explain its moral supremacy in the literature and life of the world."



CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE PLACE OF MIRACLES IN MODERN  
APOLOGETICS



## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### THE PLACE OF MIRACLES IN MODERN APOLOGETICS

There is no term more characteristic of the Christian religion as set forth in the writings of theologians of past generations than the word "supernatural." It carried along with it in an important sense the entire contents of the Christian revelation. Nature and Revelation were correlated and contrasted with each other in a way to indicate that that which peculiarly distinguished and defined revelation was the supernatural origin and character of the truths contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. There is perhaps no point of approach to the study of Christian Apologetics, and of the grounds of theistic and Christian belief that will more quickly reveal the old and new methods of setting forth the evidences of Christianity than to consider the change that has come about in the manner of interpreting the supernatural and the place assigned to it among the great arguments to prove the existence of God and the divine character of the Christian religion. It is in studying miracles that we come more directly perhaps than anywhere else to realise what the change in emphasis from the transcendence to the immanence of God really means in its bearing on the interpretation of the Divine Being and his government of the world. In like manner we find that whereas the older generation of theologians found in the miracles of Christ proofs of his physical transcendence the theologians of to-day see in them, as their greatest element of value, a revelation of an ethical transcendence which gives them their greatest significance and their greatest revelation value to the present generation. The tendency of modern Apologetics is to attach less importance to the physically supernatural in Christianity and increasingly more importance to that which is ethically transcendent and supernatural.

## I

THE PLACE OF MIRACLES IN TRADITIONAL  
THEOLOGY

Of all religious truth that which is most important and most needs the clear light of divine revelation is the knowledge of God; and the doctrine of God which the Christian religion has given to the world is its first and greatest contribution to mankind. When man, in the dim twilight of nature, unaided by supernatural revelation, has done the very best that he can do to arrive at a true knowledge of God it is yet found that his knowledge of the Divine Being is so imperfect that it needs to be both supplemented and corrected by a divine revelation from above. Only after considering the divinest of all the supernatural means and methods whereby God has revealed himself to the world, that of the incarnation of his Son, are we prepared to consider most advantageously to what extent miracle and prophecy may be appealed to as modes of divine revelation preceding and accompanying the revelation made in and by Christ. In discussing the subject of miracles here and now, we shall assume, what is later to be considered most carefully, the supernatural character of Christ's divine-human personality.

*I. The Argument from Miracles*

The traditional and long prevalent view of miracles and of their evidential value as a credential of divine revelation may be stated as follows: A miracle is an event in the natural and external world which is altogether beyond and above the power of man or the course of nature to accomplish, and which can be explained in no other way than as a special and extraordinary intervention of the Supreme Will and Power within the realm of nature's laws. Miracles were wrought for the specific and avowed purpose of revealing the nature and will of God and of attesting the divine commission of certain chosen men through whom God has been pleased to communicate his will to the world. To serve this purpose it was necessary that they should not be done "in a corner," but, as was the case

with most of the great miracles recorded in the Scriptures, publicly and openly, where they could be tested and proved. The Biblical books contain a record of many such events. Assuming the historical trustworthiness of these books, the argument based on the recorded facts may be stated as follows:—

“Looking backward through all the economies, we see that the great assemblages of miracles were wrought at crises pregnant with importance to the great cause in the Old Testament. The ante-Mosaic miracles were authentications, not of God’s messengers only, but of his own dread name and attributes. At the introduction of the Mosaic institute there was reason for the glorious manifestations of the divine power, rebuking the long-endured perverseness of Egypt, authenticating the Law-giver so slowly accepted by his own people, proving the divinity of what we call the Mosaic economy, and confirming that proof by signs following down to the miraculous entrance into Canaan. While the Theocracy lasted, every recorded wonder attested at the critical hour that Jehovah reigned. The miracles which clustered around the persons of Elijah and Elisha asserted Jehovah’s supremacy at a time when his cause was at stake in the chosen land. And, finally, after long comparative cessation, there was a great and in some respects unexampled renewal of miracles to rescue the sinking faith of the people during their captivity. The miracles of Scripture are most confessedly worthy of the cause they support. They effectually teach the lessons of the divine will and illustrate the divine perfections. Not a miracle in the whole Bible fails to demonstrate either the power or the fidelity or the wisdom or the justice or the mercy of God.”

These words from an English theologian of a generation ago (Dr. W. B. Pope) constitute a clear statement of the “argument from miracles” so much relied on by the Christian apologetes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

## 2. *Christ and Miracles*

If ever a person has appeared in history who could and should have worked miracles, that person is the Jesus of the four Gospels. For such a person as he is described to have

been to perform deeds of more than ordinary power, "mighty works" described as supernatural, is altogether natural. The most natural supernaturalism described in the Bible, therefore, is that associated with the person of Christ. He who would most strongly defend the supernatural in Christianity wisely places in the foreground the divine-human Christ and the miracles attributed to him. No other supernaturalism is altogether so sane and so divine as that which surrounds him. If the inspired narratives are to be credited, the miracles attributed to him had the effect they were intended to produce—to carry men's thoughts first to God, and later to Christ himself as God. "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him." The miracle-working power thus culminated in our Lord, whose life, although it was in a sense the most natural and human of all lives, was also in a sense one prolonged miracle, proving not only that he was "a teacher come from God," but proving also—seeing that he wrought all his miracles by his own power—that he was himself very God as well as very man. "If," said our Lord to his Apostles, "I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not sinned by their unbelief." And in like manner God himself seems to have said of and to mankind: "If I had not done in the world the works which no man could do, there could be no sin in doubting or denying my existence, my presence, and my power in the world."

### *3. The Miracles of the Old Testament*

After the miracles of Christ, the next best examples of miracles possessed of high moral value are to be found perhaps in the life and work of Moses, certainly so if we are to go to the Old Testament for our illustration of what miracles can do in the case of individuals and nations. When God would do a great work in the world through Moses and the Hebrew people, he began by revealing himself to them and awakening within them a sense of the reality of his own existence and of his sovereign power and authority over them. This was

accomplished in the only way in which it could then have been effectively accomplished—by a series of personal experiences and an exhibition of mighty works which are designed to reveal not only his presence and power, but also his holy character and his will and purpose concerning them. Without the experience of Moses at the burning bush in the Arabian desert revealing God as Jehovah, the great I Am, there could never have been a leader like Moses in Hebrew history; and without some such “mighty works” as those wrought in Egypt, making yet other revelations and experiences of God, it is, indeed, not easy to see how that race of Hebrew slaves to whom Moses went with his divine message could ever have been rallied around a religious leader and transformed into a great nation. And yet further, it is impossible to conceive of that newly formed and feeble nation becoming morally the most influential of all ancient nations, as they did indeed become, without taking into account the marvellous experiences and occurrences which transpired from time to time in their history, and which were interpreted by them as interpositions and demonstrations of the divine Presence and Power.

It was the superior knowledge of God possessed by the Hebrews which more than any other one thing explains their moral superiority and influence in history; and it was the events which they interpreted as miracles wrought by Jehovah in the beginning and throughout the entire course of their history which, if we are to trust the sacred narrative, more than any other one thing explains their superior knowledge of God. If God had revealed himself in a special manner to the Hebrew people for their own sakes alone, that they might have and keep to themselves the knowledge he gave, such election and partiality could not be reconciled with the character of an infinitely perfect Being who was the common God and Father of all men; but whatever of moral privileges and favour he imparted to them was for the benefit not of themselves alone but of all mankind. Divine election is indeed a privilege, but, far from being an expression of favouritism, it is in reality a call to service and an investment with moral responsibility and divine obligations.

God revealed himself by signs and wonders to the Hebrews that they might know him and reveal him to the world. Viewed in this light the mighty works and wonders of Hebrew history are full of moral significance and in every way worthy of God. Certain it is that some experiences and events occurred in Hebrew history, which resulted in their having an immeasurably higher knowledge of God than that possessed by any other ancient nation; and certain it is that their historians have described many of these experiences and events in terms which have caused them to be called miracles and interpreted as supernatural. Far more important, however, is it that experiences and events that occur in the life of a man or a nation shall impart a true knowledge of God and a high sense of obligation to others than it is that these experiences and events shall be supernatural. The naturalness or supernaturalness of an experience or event may be a matter of interpretation; and we can conceive that one and the selfsame experience or event could be interpreted and described by one person as something supernatural and by another as natural. God is the God of nature just as truly as of supernature. If one experience or event is to be accounted more "divine" than another, this quality of greater or less "divineness" is not determined by the matter of its being natural or supernatural but by its moral influence and effect in imparting a truer and higher knowledge of God and of moral life and duty. This is the "miracle" that is the crowning experience of God's people. The miracles, then, in Hebrew history which we are most concerned to have the proof of are those divine experiences and events that led them to a true knowledge of God and moral duty. This is the true measure of the supernatural in a nation's history, the morally miraculous, beside which the physically miraculous is relatively unimportant.

## II

## ARE MIRACLES HELPS OR HINDRANCES TO FAITH?

Are miracles, as traditionally defined, helps or hindrances to faith in God in our day? Has the modern mind become so

scientific in its interpretation of nature as to believe that nature's laws are not only uniform but immutable, and that any and all events recorded in the Scriptures involving an interruption of these laws by supernatural or superhuman forces are positive hindrances and not helps to faith in the Bible? There are those who answer this last question in the affirmative and say that miracles have to be carried as liabilities and not as assets in the propagation of the Christian faith in our day. "The instinctive faith of the modern temper," says an eminent religious leader of England, "may be expressed in this formula: I believe in an order that admits no miracle and knows no supernatural." And suppose we should be compelled to admit that to many modern believers in Christianity miracles have come to be difficulties and hindrances to faith and that the "argument from miracles" has largely disappeared from modern apologetics, would it follow that we are to regard every record of a miraculous event in the Bible as either a misstatement or a misinterpretation of what occurred? Such an inference would be wholly unwarranted. But so vital is the bearing of the study and interpretation of miracles on faith in God, that no one who is making a survey of the paths that lead to God in our day, or in any day, can afford to omit this subject from his studies. We desire to point out what changes in emphasis have taken place in the presentation of the "argument from miracles" as it bears on our conception of God as both transcendent and immanent in his relation to nature.

### *1. The Natural and the Supernatural Alike Divine*

Our conception of nature and its laws and of their relation to the immanent and ever-active Creator and Preserver of the universe, as presented in the chapter titled "Through Nature to God," might be interpreted as relating God so vitally and causally to nature as to render the supernatural superfluous and unnecessary. But the inference may also be drawn from that conception of God and nature, that if God be so vitally related as is there claimed to the regular, ordinary and uniform operations of natural law, it is easy to see how—indeed,

it is altogether reasonable to expect that—if there should arise sufficient cause for bringing about some events out of the ordinary, regular and uniform order of nature, then the method of securing these extraordinary results or events might be called supernatural. Under this conception, however, the natural and the supernatural would be alike divine—the latter no more divine than the former. Indeed, if this interpretation of nature and the supernatural, as alike related to and dependent upon the immanent and everywhere active personal God, be correct, the most important fact proved by anything supernatural would be not that God could do something “supernatural,” but that he is absolute Master of nature, and the operation of all its laws are absolutely and immediately under his control and are but an expression of his own ceaseless activity.

Does not the regular and ordinary working of the law of gravitation throughout the physical universe call for and manifest a divine power more truly than any irregular and extraordinary interruption of that law possibly could? Do not the operations of nature's laws in connection with the ever-recurring seasons, producing seedtime and harvest, and supplying food for all living creatures, call for and manifest the power and goodness and love of God more than the sending of food to a hungry prophet by a raven possibly could? Do not the maintenance of the regular beating of the human heart and the circulation of the blood and the operation of the digestive organs in the human body call for and manifest divine power in the preservation of the life of the race more than the raising of a dead man to life possibly could? Whatever need and evidence there may be for the supernatural, we must never allow ourselves to believe that it calls for and manifests the Divine more truly than does the natural if the natural be rightly interpreted and rightly related to God? This being true, we approach the examination of the subject of the supernatural in the Christian religion with the antecedent feeling that if we should find it here or there, it will be something, not occult, uncanny and suggestive of magic and mystery, but an out-of-the-ordinary intervention of divine power to accom-

plish results extraordinary, events all the more impressive and effective because of the fact that they are not in the regular and uniform natural order. It becomes then simply a question as to whether an end sought can be best accomplished by ordinary natural means or in a manner out of the ordinary by methods or means supernatural but not unnatural.

Let us apply this method of approach to the consideration of what is perhaps the greatest of all miracles in the Christian system, the resurrection of the physical body of Jesus Christ from the dead. Let us suppose now that the divine motive and end in this miracle was not for a moment to show forth God's power as a wonder worker by calling forth from the tomb a dead man and having the uncanny body to move about mysteriously here and there, now like a spirit unrecognised, and now like the Christ the disciples had known in the flesh—not this at all. Suppose, on the contrary, that the one great need was that the discouraged disciples might be saved from the utter despair that threatened them after the crucifixion of their Lord, and that it was all important for them to know that, although he had been crucified, he was himself not dead but alive forever more, and Lord of life and death, their Captain and their King—could this all-important end have been accomplished, had the body of the crucified Christ been allowed to moulder in the tomb in the ordinary and natural manner? Most of us who are Christians believe that the miracle of the resurrection was necessary in order to "save the day" at this critical juncture and not only preserve faith alive but give it the power of endless life and conquest. The end justified the means.

Many who do not believe that any physical resurrection at all awaits those who die, yet believe that the physical body of Jesus Christ arose from the dead, and that it was a supernatural event fully justified by the conditions that confronted the disciples after the crucifixion—in which case, the mission of this resurrection body having been fully accomplished, it may have supernaturally vanished away, even as it had supernaturally come; or it may have taken such material form as do the disintegrated and dissipated bodies of the other dead. Those

of course, who believe in the resurrection of all physical bodies (which is the traditional faith of the Christian Church), simply believe that Christ, retaining his resurrection body, became in so doing, as the inspired writer expresses it, "the first-fruit of them that sleep." This is mentioned only to show how that, in spite of much speculation and difference of opinion as to the reality and nature of a physical resurrection for those who die, faith in the resurrection of Christ from the dead as an extraordinary and supernatural event is well nigh universal among Christian believers. That Christ brought life and immortality to light in the Gospel, and that the immortality of the soul is the most vital and precious element in that revelation of the future life, is also the faith of all Christians. If his resurrection from the dead, and the revelations made by him during the forty days between his resurrection and ascension, were necessary to establish and make permanent faith in this vital doctrine of Christianity—which many think is the case—we have herein an important reason, additional to that above, for the miracle of the resurrection, belief in which has been called "the article of a standing or falling faith."

## *2. The Supernatural Reinforcement of the Natural*

If God reveals something of himself and of his will through physical nature and yet more through human nature, it is nevertheless universally recognised that this natural and ordinary revelation is inadequate to meet man's deepest spiritual needs, being insufficient to impart a wholly satisfying knowledge of God. The revelation of nature is good as far as it goes, but it needs to be supplemented, as men's gropings after God show, by some additional light—something to supplement the natural and the human revelation. The light of nature is like twilight—it furnishes light enough to show us which way to travel, and proves that there is a sun, a source of light, somewhere; but the sun itself during the twilight is hid from our sight. The light of the Christian revelation in and through Christ is like the daylight, in that we not only have all the light needed but we can see the sun itself, the

source from which the light emanates. In the Bible and the Christian religion we have what is common to designate as a "supernatural" revelation. Whether this term rightly or wrongly designates and describes that revelation may be open to question, but certain it is that those who have had the benefit of its light have had a knowledge of God possessed by no others.

The history of the various races of mankind who have derived their knowledge of God entirely from nature and reason and tradition has been one not merely of a groping after God, but of a flickering faith and a perpetual wandering from God, and is the best possible proof of the absolute necessity of some such revelation from God and of God as we possess in the Bible and the Christian religion in order to furnish man with a true knowledge both of himself and of his Creator. What we need to do, is to put the emphasis not on God's doing something supernatural in the physical world, to show forth his physical transcendence and power over nature; but on his doing something in the experience of the Hebrew nation that led them to interpret him more truly and to reach a better knowledge of him than other nations attained unto. The superior knowledge of God and the moral law which they attained unto is the all-important thing that we are concerned with; because that has been transmitted to us, and is ours as well as theirs. How they interpreted the experiences that led them into this higher and truer knowledge of God, whether they should be described as supernatural or not is a secondary matter. Let us be sure that we put the emphasis at the right place, not abandoning miracles but viewing them from this ethical angle.

### III

#### REACTION AGAINST MIRACLES

However strongly this "argument from miracles" has appealed to past generations and may still appeal to a certain type of believers in our day, it is not now, at least in its traditional form as presented above, relied upon by modern Chris-

tian apologists generally to convince men of the divine character of the Biblical revelation. To test the accuracy of this statement one needs only to examine the contents of recent representative volumes of Apologetics. What he will find is, not a denial of the supernatural, but a reinterpretation of it—an interpretation of it not as something unnatural or extra-natural or preter-natural but as an extraordinary manifestation of the presence and power of the immanent and everywhere active God to whom what we call the natural and the supernatural are all one. It is not uncommon now, as we have already observed, to hear men say that miracles are hindrances rather than helps to faith in our day. This is equivalent to saying that men do not now believe in God and the Bible, in Christ and Christianity, because of miracles; they rather believe that such miraculous events as those described in the Bible did actually once occur only because they already, and for other reasons, believe in God and the Bible, in Christ and Christianity.

### *I. Radical Criticism Stated and Answered*

As a representative of those who entertain radically critical views and who regard miracles as serious incumbrances to modern Christianity we may quote from Dr. Frederick Paulsen who says: "The Biblical miracles belong to a category of world-views which has disappeared, or at least cannot long survive. I do not believe that the Church can ever again win the confidence of thinking men until she decides to discard the belief in miracles. All endeavours to make the miracles of the Bible appear credible simply serve to increase the distrust. It may be that miracles and signs were once needed to strengthen the faith of the Church; at present they merely discredit it."<sup>1</sup> When Professor Paulsen says, as he does here,

<sup>1</sup> Among eminent theologians and Bible scholars of Great Britain who have regarded miracles as serious difficulties in the way of faith, and have found a way to explain the Scripture miracles to their own satisfaction as events involving nothing abnormal or supernatural in the ordinary sense of that term, is the late Dr. Sanday of Oxford University. See the chapter on "The Nature of Miracles" in his volume titled "Divine Overruling" (1920). See also "Religion and Miracle" by George A. Gordon.

that "it may be that miracles were once needed to strengthen the faith of the Church," he indicates how best to answer his own declaration of disbelief in miracles. For, if "miracles were once needed," it cannot be thought a thing incredible or even unreasonable that God would meet the real need that existed.

Over against this position of Dr. Paulsen, then, the Christian apologist may reply and state himself thus: Miracles were necessary to the introduction of the Christian religion in the world. They were continued by God as accompaniments to the revelations of his will as long as they were needed; but when "the fulness of time" was come, when the long accumulating body of revelations was complete and the perfect Revealer had come and brought his final revelation to man and set his seal to this body of divinely revealed truth, and when faith in God, as revealed in and by Christ, had come to be a matter of subjective personal experience, then miracles, being no longer needed, were discontinued. They were discontinued because the time had come when the propagation of the faith would be accomplished more rapidly and effectively without the continued working of miracles than with them. Christianity needed these supernatural props and protection when it was young and was taking root in the soil of humanity where it had been planted. Now it has come to pass not only that they are no longer needed; but even an appeal to them as having once been wrought is not now needed. A stranger may present important credentials in order to be received and believed in; and he may be received and trusted because of these credentials. After long years of faithful service, if he should produce and present these same credentials to a later generation, they would be believed to be genuine by the new generation only because men believe in him. First they believed in him because they believed in his credentials; now they believe that his old credentials, the use of which was long ago discontinued, are genuine and true because they believe in him. So it may be with the miracles of the Christian religion —that credentials, being no longer needed, should be no longer used, is entirely consistent with their being not only genuine

but of the highest value at the time when they were needed and used.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. *Do Biblical Miracles Furnish Proof or Need Proof?*

In the view of many, therefore, miracles, instead of being proofs, are the things which most of all need proof in our scientific age; instead of being a ground on which we believe in the inspiration of the Bible we must needs believe in the truth of the Biblical record, and that very fully, in order to believe that events, so contrary to the universal experience of all men now living, ever did really occur. "If miracles were, in the estimation of a former age, among the chief supports of Christianity," said the late Baden Powell, "they are at present among the main difficulties and hindrances to its acceptance." The flood, destroying the entire human race with the exception of Noah and his family, turning a rod into a serpent and the river Nile into blood, the destruction of the first-born in every home in Egypt in one night, the budding of Aaron's rod, healing disease by looking at a brazen serpent, Lot's wife transformed into a pillar of salt because she looked back at the burning city, the stopping of the waters of the Jordan river, the fall of Jericho's walls at the blowing of the trumpets, Joshua's staying the sun and the moon in their course to give the children of Israel advantage in battle, the miraculous burning of the sacrifice soaked in water on Mt. Carmel, the appearance of Samuel's ghost to Saul in the condemned haunt of the witch of Endor, the cure of Naaman's leprosy by bathing in the Jordan, making the iron axe to swim, smiting the entire Syrian army with blindness, the resurrection of the dead man by touching Elisha's bones, the destruction of Sennacherib's army in a night, the preservation of the three Hebrew children in a fiery furnace, and of Daniel in the lion's den, and of Jonah in the whale's belly—these and all similar marvellous and unnatural events, if they were found in any other book of ancient literature rather than in the Bible, would, it is granted, be regarded simply as myths or

<sup>1</sup> This was the method of stating the "argument from miracles" employed by the late distinguished Danish theologian, Dr. H. L. Martensen.

legends, and no faith would be placed in them as actual occurrences. The records, moreover, that should contain them, instead of being thereby elevated into special value, importance, and trustworthiness, would, by the very presence of such stories in them be so seriously discounted as to forfeit any claim they might otherwise have to being regarded as a trustworthy record of facts. Why then, it is being asked more and more, should we not only believe them when found in the Bible, but actually appeal to them as proofs that the Bible is a divinely inspired volume? If this question is reasonable, it demands a reasonable answer.

Now those who hold this view—that miracles are hindrances rather than helps to faith in the Bible in our day—do not necessarily deny that Scripture miracles really occurred; many of those holding this view are as ready to defend the truthfulness of the records as those who regard miracles as possessed of the highest value in confirming the doctrine of Biblical inspiration. But they regard them as hindrances to faith, and think they ought to be treated, not as forceful evidences to be placed in the foreground, but rather as difficulties, to be thrown in the background and calling for defence and explanation.

This class of theological writers is in the habit of discounting the so-called "external evidences" of Christianity as of little or no value, and of placing the whole emphasis upon the "internal evidences"—that is, upon those self-evidencing moral and spiritual teachings of the Bible that need no external evidences to give them authority. For instance, do the sublime messages of the prophet Isaiah, or the Sermon on the Mount, or the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians, they ask, need any miracles to authenticate them or make them seem divinely inspired? The moral and spiritual truths of the Bible that carry the evidence of their divine origin within them are the "gold and silver," and all else is regarded by them as "wood, hay and stubble." It is an "evil and adulterous generation" that "seeketh after a sign," and while God has condescended to answer, in part at least, their demand, yet these words imply that a holy and spiritual generation would be raised above

the necessity of seeking these signs. Miracles belong, like pictures, to the spiritual childhood of the race, and they who continue to be dependent on miracles as the foundation of their faith in the Bible never rise beyond a child's conception of God and divine truth. Miracles, therefore, say these writers, have little or no value now as evidences of the divine character of the Christian religion, and its Bible; and if thinking men in this day and generation believe the Scriptures to be the word of God—as most assuredly unnumbered multitudes do—it is not because of, but rather in spite of, the miracles they contain.

We may say, then, in answer to the question as to whether the Biblical miracles furnish proof or themselves need proof, that both may be true—they may need proof for our day, such historic and rational proof either direct or circumstantial as would be required for establishing the certitude of any event. Then, having been thus proved, they take their proper place among the credentials of the Christian religion.

### 3. *Miracles, Magic and Science*

In the days when mankind generally believed in magic, witchcraft, sorcery and such like things, all pretending to command superhuman powers, the problem was rightly to relate miracles to and differentiate them from these uncanny expressions of faith in the supernatural; but in our day, in our scientific age, the problem is rightly to relate miracles to the scientific interpretation of nature, to faith in the uniformity of nature's laws. Professor E. H. Johnson, of Crozer Theological Seminary, has coupled these three things together in an instructive manner in words which, with some condensation, we here quote:

"Miracles furnish another problem of divine rulership as to which imagination can be of service. Miracles have been discredited and good Christians have been distressed through unwitting confusion of miracles with magic. These differ entirely as regards the human intermediary, the superhuman doer and the work done. Magic claimed to be both science and art. As science it knew of secret resources in nature, and

as art it had skill to use these. This was 'white magic.' But the magician might also be able to compel obedience from superhuman beings; and if this was through a compact with evil spirits, his art was 'black magic.' Had Jesus cast out demons through Beelzebub their prince, he would not have been a miracle-worker, but a sorcerer, an adept in black magic. He needed to vindicate himself from such a charge. We find, then, three distinguishing characteristics in magic: first, the human practitioner makes out by use of mystic forms of words, by drawing geometrical figures, by burning aromatics, or even through mechanical contrivances, actually to compel and control occult forces, natural or supernatural; secondly, the superhuman agent may be a minor divinity, a false god, but is always less than Deity, for magic never pretended to power over the Most High; thirdly, the result is characteristic of the actors. If these are good men, good genii, their work is good, in an earthly way, but it is without moral or spiritual significance.

"Miracles were an affair neither of science nor of art. No one pretended to understand how miracles were done, nor to compel their production. If they came, they came only as gifts from their real worker. That worker was always God, either directly or by an angel sent for the purpose. Miracles were characteristic of their source. If they conferred a worldly benefit it was not without moral relations or aims. It was to aid somehow in setting up the kingdom of God among men.

"Summarily, magic is by man's art; miracle is a gift to men. Magic is by superhuman agents subject to the magician's will; miracle is by God alone, and at his will alone. Magic is wrought through spells; miracle is granted to prayer. Magic is of earthly meaning; miracle is of spiritual meaning."<sup>1</sup>

#### 4. *The Miracles of Ecclesiastical History*

According to the faith of Protestants generally, the term "miracle" should not be used in describing events that have occurred since the apostolic age, whether they be ordinary or

<sup>1</sup> "The Religious Use of the Imagination," p. 109 ff. We can here merely refer to the connection between magic and miracle in religion. The student who wishes to make a careful and comprehensive study of this subject will find it treated at length in "The Golden Bough" by Sir James George Frazer, and in various works on Comparative Religion.

extraordinary events. For there are, in the Protestant view, no well-authenticated miracles since that time. Roman Catholic history, on the contrary, abounds to this day in occurrences that claim to be miracles, but which Protestants who investigate them find to be utterly lacking both in the evidence and in the moral credentials which could alone justify the recognition of them as miracles.

There is perhaps no better way to destroy faith in supernatural religion and in the Biblical miracles than to tie them up with mythical and ecclesiastical miracles, as if they all belonged alike and equally to the supernatural order. The miracles of Christ are so sane, so beneficent, so ethical, that one needs only to compare and contrast them with the unsane, morbid, extravagant, unethical miracles of the mythical imagination and of ecclesiastical history to discern at once the difference between miracles that are worthy and those that are unworthy of a divine Being. Take for instance, the miracles of the New Testament Apocrypha: They represent Jesus as acting often in a repellent and spiteful manner—he strikes a boy dead for running against him; he performed miracles like turning clay sparrows into living birds—performances that are mere prodigies, ostentatious displays of wonder-working power that are not only utterly lacking in moral significance, but are sometimes wrought merely to gratify selfish whims and fancies.

In marked contrast with the miracles of Scripture are these apocryphal miracles, as are also the later miracles of ecclesiastical history, some of which are thus described:

“Jerome in his life of Hilarion gravely narrates such things as these: A certain Italicus, whose horses raced in the circus, prayed Hilarion to give him, since he was a Christian, a victory over his heathen rival, whereupon by water out of the cup from which the saint was accustomed to drink, the horses of Italicus were made to flee to the goal, while those of his heathen competitor stuck fast to the spot. Hilarion casts out a lascivious devil from a maid who had been bewitched by certain magic figures and formulas buried beneath the threshold of her house. A gigantic camel which it took thirty men with

strong ropes to hold, because of its being possessed of a devil, was dispossessed by the saint of its indwelling devil. Again he commanded a mighty serpent which had been devouring oxen to ascend a pyre and be burned to ashes before all people. Many months after his death, his body being miraculously preserved as perfect as if alive, and fragrant with sweet odours, was borne from Cyprus to Palestine, and then after his burial, not only at the place where he was buried but even at places where he had been while living, great miracles were performed daily, in the one case by his dead body and in the other by his spirit.

"St. Gregory's miracles are even more marvellous than those of Hilarion described by Jerome, for he tells how certain of his Italian fathers or monks could treat the water as if it had been solid land; how pieces of gold, fresh from the mint, fell upon them from heaven; how floods which rose even to the roofs of churches did not enter in at the doors, though they stood wide open; how the arm of an executioner, uplifted to strike off a monk's head, remained erect and fixed, sword and all, in the air, but power over it was restored on the promise of being made never again to use it against a Christian.

"Again the mediaeval friar would tell his hearers how a robber, who had been always devout and regular in his prayers to the Virgin Mary, was at length taken and sentenced to be hanged, but when the cord was around his neck he prayed to his heavenly patroness, and she, with her own white hands, held him up two whole days; and so saved him from death. And again he would tell how a paper of Scriptural proofs, which St. Dominic had written to confound his opponents, leaped out of the fire into which it had been cast, while the documents of the opponents remained in the fire and were utterly consumed."<sup>1</sup>

As an example of modern ecclesiastical miracles we cite the following, quoting from the "Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research," Vol. XXI, p. 405:

"Owing to the risk of a riot between the clerical and anti-clerical parties at Remiremont, on the Vosges, in 1907, the civic authorities thought it necessary to prohibit a specially important religious procession in honour of the Madonna.

<sup>1</sup> See Fairbairn's "Philosophy of the Christian Religion."

A few days later there occurred a fall of large oval hailstones, in which more than one hundred devout Catholics, including men, women and children, declared on oath that they had recognised images of the Madonna."

Now, if the miracles of Scripture were of no higher order than these miracles of ecclesiastical history, the result would have been fatal to faith in the Scriptures, and to faith in a God who would exercise his power to work them; and yet St. Jerome, St. Gregory, and even St. Augustine, and many other church saints, gave credence to them. But this does not make us believe in them, even though we credit the saints named as trustworthy witnesses when it comes to matters of fact in Church history.

#### IV

### THE REINTERPRETATION OF THE SUPERNATURAL AND REAFFIRMATION OF FAITH IN MIRACLES

It is an unfortunate circumstance to be noted in connection with the study of miracles in our day that many take up the idea that any and all attempts to reinterpret them in a manner helpful to the modern scientific mind is at heart an effort to get rid of the supernatural—to explain it away rather than to explain it. We do not feel that this suspicion is justified by the writings of the sanest and safest exponents of modern Christian theism.

#### *I. The New Approach to the Supernatural*

The time was when the supernatural was regarded as something unnatural, an order so much above the natural as to be not only distinguishable from it but separated from it; and in like manner the superhuman was regarded as something so far above and removed from the human as to be unhuman. The tendency in our day is to find in the supernatural the ideal natural, nature at its best, the natural in its highest expression; and to regard the superhuman as the human in its highest and noblest visible expression. The old way of look-

ing at the supernatural and superhuman was to have them separated so far from the natural and the human that a great gulf or chasm intervened, and the invasion of the natural and human realms by or from the supernatural and superhuman resulted in a more or less violent interruption of the natural order by something preternatural and of the human *modus operandi* by preter-human forces. To the modern mind there is no great gulf of separation fixed between the natural and the supernatural. As there is no line that marks the boundary between the finite and the infinite in space, separating the one from the other,—as the one extends or merges imperceptibly into the other, so the natural and the supernatural, the human and the superhuman merge into each other. There is here a fountain, and there a rivulet and then a river and out yonder the unbounded ocean; but they merge into each other.

The older theologians and thinkers approached the conception of the supernatural and superhuman from the side of the infinite and the Divine, from the realm of the incomprehensible and unknown; and they interpreted and explained the supernatural in terms of the divine transcendence. The modern approach to the supernatural and superhuman is from the side of the natural and the human, from the known to the unknown, and the tendency is to interpret and explain the miraculous more in terms of the natural and human as related to the divine immanence than was thought possible or even conceivable by those who made the other approach. The result that was to be expected duly followed, namely, those who interpreted the supernatural and superhuman in terms of the natural and human were thought by those who had long been accustomed to the other traditional method of interpretation to be getting rid of God and eliminating the Divine entirely. With this general reference to the change in method of approach and of interpretation, let us inquire as to how far a supernatural order has been revealed or discovered, and how the supernatural may be best interpreted and explained so as to make it a pathway to God for the scientific age in which we live, and which, though scientific, is none the less theistic in its belief than was the age that preceded it.

Traditional theology, as we have seen, interpreted God's activity in the world in terms of transcendence, of supernaturalism, of occasionalism, of occasional intervention into the realm of nature and natural law; it was the unusual, the irregular, the extraordinary events and occurrences which were regarded as the special revelations and manifestations of the Divine presence and power. Modern theism, on the contrary, tends to interpret the immanent God as the great personal Power in the invisible Powerhouse of the universe, who is ceaseless in his operations in the realms of physical law, of vegetable and animal life, and of moral and rational existence. When Marconi discovered that electricity was everywhere in the air and the ether, that the "power-house" was everywhere, he furnished us with a new physical illustration of the immanence of God. This all-pervasive force or energy that we call electricity is the physical expression in the material universe of that omnipresent Personal Power that we recognise and worship as God. The regular and uniform laws of nature and of life, and the self-determining power exercised by free spiritual beings,—power to turn on and off the ever-moving currents of Divine energy at the commands of finite creatures,—power to tune in and catch from the radiant air the wireless and wordless messages that the Divine Being is always and everywhere sending forth to those of his creatures that have ears to hear and minds rightly to interpret his messages—this is something of what it means to interpret God in terms of immanence and law, laws of matter, mind and spirit, all alike owing their origin and continued existence to Him who is at once not only the great personal Power in the everywhere present Power-house of the physical universe, but the Heavenly Father in the household of spirits, in whom centres and from whom radiates all that makes life sweet, lovable and beautiful—in whom we live and move and have our being.

## *2. A Reinterpretation of the Supernatural*

Dr. Borden P. Bowne, writing of the false antithesis of the natural and supernatural characteristic of much popular thought, past as well as present, says: "For the full expres-

sion of our thought in this matter we have to maintain a supernatural natural, that is, a natural which roots in a divine causality beyond it; and also a natural supernatural, that is, a divine causality which proceeds by orderly methods. In such a view, events are supernatural in their causality, and natural in the order of their happening; and a so-called special providence would be simply an event in which the divine purpose and causality which are in all things, could be more clearly traced than in familiar matters.”<sup>1</sup> And again, in his volume of “Studies in Christianity,” he says: “The supernaturalism of to-day is concerned only to find God in nature, life, history, miracle—no matter where so long as it finds him; but it finds him predominantly in law and life. This is producing a sanity of religious thought beyond anything known in the past, and it is prophetic of still better things to come.”

Among those who have reinterpreted the supernatural in terms of modern Christian thought and who believe profoundly in the immanence of God and the incarnation of his Son in the person of Jesus Christ, none has written more luminously than the late Dr. Lyman Abbott in his volume titled “Seeking After God,” in which will be found scattered paragraphs which we here bring together, thoughts of such value that we feel sure no reader will object to the length of the quotation:

“I once conceived of God as sitting apart from his creation which he had made and ruling it, and apart from men whom he had made and ruling them from his faraway throne in heaven, and coming down ever and anon for special work, in answer to our prayers, or for the accomplishment of special providences. As long as I entertained this conception of God as sitting apart from his universe and ruling it from a distance, it seemed to me that the most fundamental question in theology was, Do you believe in the supernatural? But now I no longer make the distinction between the natural and the supernatural as I once did.

“When I thought that God sat apart from nature, ruling over it as an engineer rules over his engine, then it seemed

<sup>1</sup> “Theism,” p. 243.

to me to be of essential importance that one should believe in the supernatural, that is, in the One who was apart from nature, and ruled over it. But now that I believe that God is *in* nature, ruling through it, and *in* humanity, ruling in the hearts of men, all the natural seems to me most supernatural, and all the supernatural most natural. For not now and then only in special episodes and exceptional interferences does the finger of God appear. God is in all of nature; all its forces are the forces of God; all its laws are the methods of God; all its activities are the activities of God. And in human nature the laws of God are the beatific influences which proceed from him, the spiritual forces projected from him as the rays from the sun, and which vivify the hearts of those who receive them.

"God is himself the life of life. All things are his breath. Literally, scientifically, absolutely, in him all things live and move and have their being. The abolition of the distinction between natural and supernatural for the purpose of getting rid of the supernatural is one thing; the abolition of the distinction for the purpose of affirming that the supernatural is in everything is quite another. This latter makes the natural itself supernatural. A miracle, therefore, no longer seems to me to be a manifestation of extraordinary power, but an extraordinary manifestation of ordinary power. God is always showing himself. Perhaps some of you may think this is a new theology; on the contrary, it is as old as St. Augustine, and as orthodox. It is Augustine who said that a birth is more miraculous than a resurrection, because it is more wonderful that something that never was should begin to be than that life which had once been in a body and had ceased to be, should be restored or revived again.

"Do you ask me, now, if I believe in miracles, I answer: I believe in some, and some events that have been called miracles I do not believe in, and some of these which are found in the Bible I do not believe were ever intended to be regarded as miracles. The story of the great fish that swallowed a prophet I do not believe was ever intended to be taken as history by the man who wrote it. Nor do I think that the story of the sun and moon standing still was ever intended by the man who wrote the narrative to be taken as history. But the resurrection of Jesus Christ seems to me to be the best-

attested fact of ancient history; attested by the witness of disciples whose interest would not have led them to attest it, and whose prejudices were all against their faith in it; attested by the change of the day of rest from the seventh day, which the Jewish nation had up to that time kept, to the first day, ever after celebrating the resurrection; attested by the growth and life of Christianity itself, which, if Christ did not rise from the dead, I must think was historically founded on either a great folly or a great fraud, and to believe that would be to believe that there is no moral order in the universe. That the disciples had ocular evidence which convinced them against all their preconceptions that the Christ was living whom they thought was dead appears to me as certain as any fact in history can be.”<sup>1</sup>

### *3. Reaffirmation of Faith in the Supernatural*

The sanity and beneficence of the miracles of Christ accord so perfectly with his character that they seem entirely natural. Over against the mythical miracles of apocryphal and ecclesiastical history, the ethical and altruistic miracles of Christ appear so natural and so real that we can but feel that they are altogether like Jesus himself, who though supernatural, was not contra-natural or unnatural.

“He heals the blind, the halt, the lame, the sick of the palsy; he brings comfort to the widow who had lost her son, and to the Gentile nobleman who mourns the death of his child. He creates joy in the heart of the woman who had sought counsel of many physicians and only grew the worse for all their attempts at healing. He goes through life like a kind of embodied beneficence, creating health and happiness wherever he goes. He incorporates and commands the energies that work against physical evil and for social good. In a sense his miracles are but the transcripts of his own character, the symbols of his mind and heart and instruments for the accomplishment of his moral and spiritual mission. They are, in a word, the physical counterparts of his own moral character and of his exalted ethical teachings. Their singular freedom from the qualities everywhere characteristic of the mythical

<sup>1</sup> “Seeking After God.”

miracles places them in a category by themselves. One thing is certain: They could not have owed their freedom from these customary mythical adornments to the Evangelists themselves; for they were men who stood, alike as regards age, culture and country, exactly at the stage when we expect the mythical consciousness to be creative and betray itself. But the miracles which the Evangelists attribute to Christ have an altogether exceptional character of moral sanity and rational sobriety. It were indeed but the simple truth to say that the Evangelists are the most modern writers of Christian antiquity. With the most absolute and august idea of the supernatural to be found in the whole literature of religion, they have given it an expression so objective and realistic as to be without any parallel. If we compare them with Church Fathers like Tertullian, Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, or with Augustine, telling of occurrences which he himself witnessed and designated as miracles, we are driven to the conclusion that our Gospels are remarkable, above all other ancient Christian histories, for critical caution and intellectual sanity.”<sup>1</sup>

“The supernatural potencies which move within Jesus,” says Dr. Fairbairn, “leave him neither an extra-natural nor a contra-natural, nor a preter-natural person, but a person to himself and for himself strictly and surely natural, with powers which are to be understood and used as means to ethical and altruistic ends, to increase the duty of obedience, to limit rather than enlarge the sphere of man’s independence of God.” The Christian world is becoming, not less but more and more, convinced as time goes on, that Jesus verily possessed “supernatural potencies within himself”; and if so, is it not altogether rational and probable that “supernatural potencies within” should find “supernatural expression without” in just such beneficent deeds in behalf of the souls and bodies of men as were the miracles of Jesus?

But this reaffirmation of faith in the supernatural works of Christ based on faith in his supernatural Person does not mean that if in the case of any individual miracle attributed to him there should arise sufficient and satisfactory reasons for

<sup>1</sup> See “Philosophy of the Christian Religion,” pp. 336-341.

doubting or denying its genuineness, this, our confidence, in the supernatural Christ is to be shaken. Should any critic come along with convincing evidence that faith in the virgin birth of Jesus should be given up, I am not, therefore, going to give up faith in his other miracles. Or should he convince me that the miracle of cursing the figtree for not having fruit on it when the time of figs had not yet come—or that his causing the destruction of the herd of swine by driving into them the devils expelled from the Gadarene demoniac is so lacking in the usual combination of Christlike qualities as to create doubt as to whether it may not be a misinterpretation or an incorrect account of some event that occurred in his experience—should I be so convinced, this may cause me to be less confident in the absolute accuracy of the divine-human Book than I may have hitherto been, but it will not in the least shake my confidence in the supernatural character of Christ or my faith in the reality of his “mighty works.” The Christlikeness of the many beneficent and unselfish deeds that crowded and crowned his busy life is self-evidencing.

#### *4. An Impressive Incident*

There is an incident that is frequently told that may furnish a fitting close to this chapter on miracles. About a half century ago it was that two young men of brilliant minds, who were regarded both by themselves and by others as infidels, sat talking about religion and its superstitions. The conversation is said to have turned on Christ whose noble character as a man both of them fully recognised and acknowledged, and then on the miracles attributed to him, all of which they both regarded as mere myths born of superstition. They agreed that some one ought to write a book exposing the unreality and falseness of these so-called supernatural events; the beautiful human life and character of the Son of Man should not be marred and discounted by such superstitious appendages as these unbelievable miracles. Agreeing heartily in the desirability of such a book being written, and written at once, the two friends raised the question as to who was best fitted to accomplish the task successfully. It was agreed

that one of the two should undertake the task of showing the absurdity of the miracles found in the life of Christ. The other awaited in self-complacent and self-confident atheism the result of his friend's literary labours. The friend in preparation for his task, proceeded to study the life of the human Jesus with a view to eliminating from it everything that claimed to be miraculous. But the more he studied and journeyed from day to day with the human Jesus, the greater the man seemed to be; and it was not long before the man Jesus grew to be so great that to this student he seemed to be more than a mere human being, and by the time this book about the Son of Man was finished, it was found to be a story of the earthly life of one who could most fittingly be called the Son of God. And the miracles were left undisturbed in his life just where they are found in the New Testament narratives. If this story has been rightly accredited, one of these two friends was the well-known infidel, Robert Ingersol, and the other was Lew Wallace, whose famous book titled "Ben Hur" is a story of the Christ which shows that if the author, in beginning his studies of his hero, believed that he was a mere man of only human gifts and virtues, before he finished his study he had reached the conclusion that miracles were a natural and fitting accompaniment to one who lived, loved, worked, suffered and died as did Jesus of Nazareth.

If a man is willing to start with the human Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels and journey with him day by day for a season, we will not reproach him because he does not at first feel that Jesus is anything more than a remarkable human being of exceptionally beautiful moral and spiritual nature. For such a student and pilgrim Cæsarea Philippi is on ahead, where if asked, "Who did you at first think Jesus to be?" he may reply: "I first thought him one like unto John the Baptist, or Elijah, or Jeremiah, or one of the great prophets." But if further on we again ask: "Who do you now think Jesus to be?", we shall confidently expect to receive an answer approximately like that of St. Peter: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God!" If the incident referred to above be not altogether accurate so far as concerns the two

men named, its principal features can without doubt be duplicated in the lives of many others, who have had a similar experience in passing from doubt to faith in miracles by coming into intimate fellowship with Jesus and reaching the conclusion that he is verily the Son of the living God.

The first and most important thing to present to and press upon seekers after God is not the historic creeds, or the "hypostatic union" of two natures in Christ, or the mysteries of the Trinity, or the necessity of believing in the virgin-birth and other miracles—these all have their place in the faith and will come later—but the important thing to do first is to get the God-seeking soul into fellowship with Jesus who has a wonderful way of leading men to find the truth and the life that satisfies the heart. If any find it easiest to start with the human Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels, let them have their way; the divine Jesus of the fourth Gospel will come later. When one has fellowshipped for some time with Jesus, the miracles attributed to him so full of mercy and goodness, will not only seem natural but it will appear positively unnatural if such a one as he was had not done some such beneficent "mighty works" as those attributed to him. Miracles, said Thomas Arnold of Rugby, were but the natural accompaniments of a life like that of Christ, accompaniments so appropriate to the Christian revelation that their absence would have been far more wonderful than their presence.



CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE PROPHETS AS INTERPRETERS AND  
REVEALERS OF GOD



## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### THE PROPHETS AS INTERPRETERS AND REVEALERS OF GOD

There is no group or succession of men in the history of any nation that ever made as notable a contribution to the moral greatness of their race as did the Hebrew prophets. Nor is there found in all literature, at least in literature antedating or subsequent to the Apostolic writings, any group or succession of writings whose contribution to the literature of their own race and of the world can be compared in its moral value and permanent moral influence to the Prophetic books of the Old Testament. And the explanation of this incomparable and far-reaching moral influence is found in the prophetic interpretation of God. Canon Mozley in his "Ruling Ideas in the Early Ages" calls attention to the fact that it was because Prophecy found a hospitable receptacle in the chosen race that it grew strong, and became an architect and builder, raised institutions and enacted ordinances. In Abraham it founded a family, in Moses a law, in David a Kingdom, in Amos, Isaiah and their fellow prophets a literature and code of national ethics, and, because of this fact, the world in all subsequent time is their debtor.

It was the distinguishing work of the Jewish people, says Dean Stanley, that their golden age was not in the past, but in the future; that their great hero was not their founder, but their founder's latest and greatest descendant; that their national aspirations and hopes gathered round the head not of a warrior but of a Prophet-King who was to come, a conqueror, indeed, but one whose greatness consisted not in physical force and the weapons of whose warfare were not carnal but moral and spiritual—mercy, truth, goodness and love. It was the prophets in Israel who kept alive the sense of God in the mind and conscience of the nation and made it possible for

the cherished expectation and coming glory of the nation to find expression in a Prophet, greater than all the prophets that had preceded him.

## I

THE ARGUMENT FROM PROPHECY—ITS VALUE  
AND LIMITATIONS

If the physical world is a medium and channel and instrument in which and through which God reveals himself to men, much more truly and effectively does God reveal himself in and through the intellectual world, through the medium of the human mind. If we may believe that God in the days of Moses wrought "mighty works" in the physical world and thereby manifested forth his presence and power, much more truly may we believe that he spoke surely and effectively to men in and through the person of Moses, the great prophet and law-giver who transformed the children of Israel into a nation. If, however, it be claimed, as it is by some, that the numerous and notable miracles said to have been wrought in Egypt and at Sinai, are exaggerations and misinterpretations of natural events on the part of the people, or pure creations of the pious imagination on the part of historians of a later day, the same cannot be said of the great ideas and thoughts and commandments which come to us through the mind of Moses, the origin and inspiration of which the great prophet attributed to God; for these ideas and thoughts and commandments, seeing that they are with us now and speak for themselves, reinforce the claim of Moses that they were inspired of God. When God speaks in and through the prophets, then, we may antecedently expect a higher and finer revelation of himself than is possible for him to make in and through physical nature, whether it be through the laws of nature or in a supernatural manner. The study of the Hebrew and Christian prophets, therefore, as interpreters and revealers of God, will furnish one of the surest and best of the pathways along which pilgrims may journey and find God.

*i. Prophecy Defined*

God has been pleased to reveal his will to men through nature; but physical nature is at best but a dim and imperfect medium of communication. God reveals himself best to men through men—through chosen men to whom in and through experience he communicates his will more directly than it is possible for him to communicate it to the less spiritual multitude who need all the more because they are less spiritual to know that will. These chosen men to whom God has spoken in a special manner that they may speak to others we call prophets. They are God's spokesmen. No prophecy is of private interpretation or limitation; it is a message from God meant for others than the prophet as well as the prophet himself. It thus appears that prophecy means not simply predictions of future events, but any and all revelations through the prophets of the mind of God to man, whether they concern the past or the present or the future. In the modern use of the argument from prophecy there has been a shifting of emphasis similar to that which we found has taken place in the use of miracles as a mode of divine revelation. Miracles involve an intervention of supernatural power in the natural world or the realm of physical law. Prophecy involves an intervention of superhuman knowledge in the intellectual world; it is a miracle in the realm of mind. It is such an intervention of the divine Mind into the realm of human thought as imparts to man a knowledge of things either past, present, or future which the human mind unaided by such special intervention could not attain to. The sacred records contain revelations made to Abraham, to Moses, to the great prophets, to many chosen ones, imparting to them ideas, conceptions, doctrines, visions of truth and duty, which we have reason to believe, would never have come into their minds apart from such special intercourse with God and revelations from him. We need not assume, however, that God used any unnatural or uncanny methods, any mysterious or magical means for making these revelations. Whatever a man who knows

God in a personal experience learns because of and through that experience and contact with God may be called a divine revelation.

Miracles of power and miracles of knowledge are well adapted to supplement, confirm and support each other; and they stand or fall together as divine credentials. One who believes that God has spoken in a special manner to and through the prophets is prepared to believe in miracles; and one who accepts the evidence of miracles is antecedently prepared to believe that holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. On the other hand, those theological writers who discount the miraculous element in the Bible may be counted on to discount or deny the supernatural element in the prophecies of Scripture.

We have seen how the transfer of emphasis in one's conception and interpretation of God from transcendence to immanence affects the interpretation of the miraculous and supernatural in the realm of matter. The same cause has brought about a change in the modern conception of prophecy—especially as concerns the inspiration of the prophets and God's method of revealing his mind and will to them and through them to others.

## *2. The Inspiration of the Prophets*

If divine inspiration is to be found in any writings coming down to us from the ancient world, it is in the messages of the Hebrew Prophets found in the Old Testament. He who looks for the only proof or the chief proof of the inspiration of these ancient seers and prophets in specific, definite and detailed predictions of future events may be left more or less unsatisfied with the result of his search; but he who studies these ancient writings, believing that the utterance of moral and spiritual truth possessed of the highest social significance and moral value to men, is the best proof a prophet can give of his divine inspiration, will not be disappointed. To see how large and rich in material of this kind the prophetic writings are it is all important that they be read as messages to men then living.

The writings of the prophets are unquestionably the obscurest and most difficult of interpretation to the modern Bible reader of all the books of the sacred canon. The reason for this is not far to seek. They are messages, sermons, discourses, warnings, exhortations, etc., delivered in forms of speech and under conditions and circumstances totally different from those now existing, and the understanding of these circumstances is absolutely necessary to a proper understanding of the messages which they called forth. Some few things in the prophetical writings are so simple and transparent as to their meaning and so true and beautiful as statements of moral and spiritual truth, that they need no interpreter. But there is no denying the fact that many parts of the writings of the prophets are so obscure that Bible readers of average intelligence have but a faint idea, if any at all, as to what they mean unless and until they are not only translated but interpreted by competent scholars. It is well for us to understand, therefore, that these writings, these messages and discourses, were never originally designed as a book of devotion for those who live in our day, but were addressed to people long since dead, and were called forth by moral conditions that have long since passed away. Many pious souls read these writings as part of their daily devotions, conscious that they do not understand one-fourth of what they read, half wondering in their hearts how and why divine inspiration could have prepared for devotional reading books so hard to be understood. There can surely be no special piety in reading what is not understood. And yet these writings have their devotional value and uses; such portions of them as are clearly understood are exceedingly rich in moral lessons.

Only then by recognising the fact that these prophetic messages have immediate reference to the moral and social conditions then existing can they be interpreted properly. The little kingdoms of Judah and Israel were not only surrounded by numerous petty heathen kingdoms with whom they were more or less in hostile conflict all the time—and if perchance at intervals friendly relations existed, this was a fruitful source of even greater moral danger in that the kings and the people

were constantly tempted into the gross forms of idolatry which those nations practised—but Palestine was the highway and battleground between the two great world monarchies that occupied respectively the valley of the Euphrates and the valley of the Nile, and it was impossible for any people occupying this territory to remain neutral. The inspired prophets and historians saw in the sins of the rulers and the people the moral necessity and cause of war and in the hostile attacks of surrounding nations the providential and divinely inflicted penalty for sin. The recognition of this fact is essential to an understanding of their messages. This may not have been to them the whole truth concerning sin and war, but it certainly was the moral truth which they felt called upon to utter and to emphasise. Mingled denunciation and comfort, hope and despair, present punishment and purification, and future pardon and restoration, existing unrighteous kings and one future ideal righteous Messiah-King—these are common themes which occupy all the prophets; and yet each prophetic message takes its colouring from the more immediate and local conditions that called it forth. But it is neither with the history nor the exegesis of the prophets that we here and now have to do. It is with the prophets as great moral teachers that we are concerned, and with their writings as possessing the marks of divine inspiration which make them good for all time in that they give expression to moral and spiritual truths which are as much needed in our day as they were needed in the days of the prophets.

The Hebrew prophets were thus the religious teachers and preachers of righteousness under the old dispensation. They were forntellers of the divine will, and not simply foretellers of future events. They were spokesmen of Jehovah to his people. To draw lessons from the past and to declare the mind of Jehovah pertaining to the present in matters of doctrine and duty constituted the largest part of their work as inspired teachers and preachers of righteousness; and much of what they predict should be interpreted not as an exhibition of foreknowledge but as declaring what under existing moral conditions should and would take place.

*3. Predictive Prophecy*

Man has large knowledge of the present and has a limited knowledge of the past, but he is ignorant of the future. God alone has knowledge without any limitation; he alone knows fully and perfectly all things that are now, that have been in the past, and that will be in the future. A sure and definite revelation of the future can come only from the divine Mind. Events, therefore, if there be such, that can be shown to have been predicted many years before they came to pass—the fore-announcement, for example, of the coming of a great leader—cannot fail to prove the omniscience of the mind from which the predictions emanated.

While the prediction of future events was only a small and occasional part of the prophet's work, nevertheless doctrinally it was a very important part, and was long regarded as relatively so important that it largely appropriated to itself the word "prophecy," which term in the writings of theologians of former generations is often used as if it referred exclusively to the prediction of future events. This limitation of the meaning of the word, however, is not warranted by the Old Testament, all of whose moral and spiritual teachings belong to prophetic literature. While, however, it is important that we do not unduly magnify and exaggerate the predictive element in prophecy, it is equally important that we do not ignore it or minimize it. No one can do this and be a fair and faithful interpreter of the Old and New Testaments as they are related to each other, and mutually related to Him who was at once the greatest subject of predictive prophecy and himself the greatest of the prophets.

The study of prophetic prediction becomes thus, if real predictions be found in the Bible, a pathway leading to a knowledge of God; and this path will be sure and illuminated with convincing evidence in proportion to the strength of the conviction that the prophetic utterances under consideration are unmistakable revelations and foreannouncements of the providential purposes of God as to the future. All rational beings have purposes and plans for the future; and the execution

of the programme of any human leader as a rule necessitates the imparting to his agents of a certain amount of information regarding his plans for the future. If God has, and has always had, a great and divine providential programme for the future—and he most surely has—in the execution of which innumerable human agents are to be employed, and these not mere passive instruments, but rational, moral free agents, it would be surprising and strange if he did not reveal to these co-operative agents some of the things planned for the future. If now the study of predictive prophecy be approached from this rational point of view it cannot fail to predispose the student to regard it as an altogether reasonable feature and accompaniment of the divine programme.

Of nothing were the theologians of a generation ago more certain than that prediction and fulfilment were meant to constitute one of the methods employed by God for authenticating divine revelation. This was regarded by them as an altogether legitimate inference from the language used in various passages in the Old and New Testaments. In Isaiah xli. 21-23 we read: "Produce your cause, saith the Lord, bring forth your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob. Let them bring them forth, and show us what shall happen: let them show the former things, what they be, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them: or declare us things for to come. Show the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods." "I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done." (Isaiah xlvi. 9, 10.) In Deuteronomy xviii. 21, 22 God speaks through Moses thus: "And if thou say in thine heart How shall we know the word which the Lord hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken." John xiv. 29 records these words of Christ: "And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe."

These passages were interpreted by evangelical commentators as teaching: (1) That God revealed his will in a special

manner to the prophets and through them to the world; that they were his spokesmen. (2) That the prediction of future events constituted not a large but an important part of his revelation to them. (3) That great weight was attached to the fulfilment of these predicted events as proofs of divine revelation, and that this credential was divinely provided for the special purpose of convincing men of their relations to God and their obligations to him, and of the part which they were to take in the carrying out of the Divine purposes and plans. That God has purposes and plans for the future is as certain as that God exists; and this means that man as well as God has a part and place in the carrying out of these plans. Predictions, therefore, even though limited and meagre, serve to reveal to men that each and every generation of mankind is not only the offspring of the past, but coworking with God, the responsible parent of the future. The kingdom of God is always a coming kingdom.

It is maintained by some that this argument, even in its strongest Messianic form, is helpful to believers only—that, unless other arguments have served to bring an unbeliever into spiritual sympathy with Christ and the Scriptures, this argument is too vague and lends itself too easily to speculation and alternative interpretations to be convincing to unbelievers—that it confirms faith but does not remove and convince doubt. Thus Pecaut, a noted French sceptic, once said: "We sometimes hear preachers cry out, 'Let one show us a single prophecy not fulfilled and we will descend from this pulpit!' I should be tempted to say to them, 'I will mount up into your place if you will show me one single prediction fulfilled.'" And Dr. Kuenen, the great Dutch theologian, argues at considerable length in his work on "The Prophets and Prophecy in Israel" to show that the larger part of the Jewish prophecies were never fulfilled, and that those that may be said to have been fulfilled bear no marks of a supernatural origin. Not a little, therefore, we must concede, depends upon the mental and moral attitude of the student of prophecy toward the supernatural element in Christianity. If one doubts or denies that there is any supernatural element in Christianity, we may

take it for granted that he will find some method satisfactory to himself of explaining away all the so-called predictions of the Old Testament. With such persons we will have to depend entirely upon the moral element in the prophetic writings to furnish us with the material for our argument. This moral argument is one the force of which none can successfully resist. Nevertheless, he alone is justified in denying or discrediting predictive prophecy who has made a faithful and conscientious study of the Messianic portions of the Old Testament Scriptures and compared them with the Christ of the New Testament and of subsequent history, and, as a result of such study, has become convinced that there are no real predictions concerning a coming Messiah in the Hebrew Scriptures.

## II

## MESSIANIC PROPHECY

It is an oft-quoted saying of Goethe, that if ever the divine appeared on earth it was certainly in the person of Jesus Christ. We may truly say that if ever Divine foreknowledge has found expression in human words and in literature, it is found in the utterances recorded in the Old Testament concerning a coming Messiah. This Hebrew word "Messiah" translated into Greek is "Christ," and into English "the anointed One." Prophets, priests and kings were sometimes if not always anointed to their offices by the use of oil, which was the physical symbol of the more important spiritual anointing without which the duties of no office in the theocracy could be properly discharged. Whatever else this coming leader of the Hebrews might be or might not be, he was to be as his name implied, the divinely anointed One.

*1. Christ the Fulfilment of Messianic Prophecy*

There is nothing surer in the Old Testament than the presence there of a long series of prophetic utterances concerning a coming royal person who came to be designated as the Messiah. These predictions as interpreted by the New Testa-

ment writers include such matters as his birth of a virgin mother and of the seed of Abraham and Judah and David; the place of his birth and the time of his coming; that he should fulfil the office of a prophet, a priest, and a king; that he should suffer, be put to death, and rise again; that his mission should be to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews; and that he should be the world's Saviour and establish a kingdom of righteousness of which there should be no end. There is scarcely anything of far-reaching importance in the life of Christ that was not made a subject of prophetic prediction. It is impossible to explain the correspondence between these predictions and the actual history on the principle of either an accidental coincidence or a fraud. Had the foreannouncements been confined to the events of a commonplace life, or had they been, taken in their entirety, obscure, ambiguous, or enigmatical, they might be attributed to ingenious surmising; but when they constitute a chain of extraordinary and unique events and traits of character interwoven with that which is commonplace and natural; it may be confidently declared that no imagination of man could ever have created such a dream. Or, supposing that it could, how could the extraordinary dream have ever become real in an actual historical person?

The Christian Church has always believed and taught that holy men of old had revealed to them by the Omniscient Being the marvellous things which they declared concerning the coming Messiah, and that his fulfilment of these marvellous predictions established his divine Messiahship. The correspondence between the composite portrait of the Messiah of the Old Testament, as drawn by no less than twenty-five different prophets, and the Christ of the New Testament, is so striking and remarkable that it constitutes, no matter how it may be explained, one of the most remarkable things in the entire range of religious literature. Surely we have here, if we have anywhere in human history, a revelation from the divine Mind. Is it possible that twenty-five different sculptors, living to some extent in different countries and in different centuries, with no understanding whatever with each other, could each hew out of the quarry a block of marble, and then,

when the last one had been dead four hundred years, that some one, gathering together these separate blocks, should find that they fitted together so as to make a perfect statue of a man—and of a man then living—so that every one who knew the living person would recognise the resemblance at once? Is such a thing conceivable? And if it should be actual, would it not be a miracle in marble and prove that the divine Mind had guided each separate sculptor in his work? Just so surely must we say that the divine Mind has guided those whose pens have drawn these various lines of Old Testament prophecy which, when brought together, make a perfect portrait of one who is instantly recognised as the Christ of the New Testament. How can one read the Messianic predictions of the Old Testament and find them all realised in the Christ of the New Testament and not believe that there is a God whose plans and purposes for the future are based on a knowledge that is infinite? And why should it be thought a thing incredible that the coming of One who proves to be, when he is come, “the desire of all nations,” should be fore-announced?<sup>1</sup>

One does not have to believe in all that traditional theology has claimed for the “argument from prophecy,” or shut his eyes to unmistakable “accommodations” on the part of New Testament writers (and that there are such is most evident), in order to feel convinced that after all due allowance has been made for all exaggerated claims and for all “accommodations,” there is a safe and trustworthy residuum of unmistakable fore-announcements of the coming of One who could not be any other than Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See chapter on “The Spirit of Christ in the Old Testament” in George Adam Smith’s “Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament.”

<sup>2</sup> The reader who cares to study in detail the passages in the Old Testament interpreted as Messianic in connection with New Testament references as to their fulfilment will find the following groups helpful. They are arranged according to subjects. No one who examines them carefully can fail to see why it is that predictive and Messianic prophecy has been the source of much speculation—why one man finds in its multitudinous “accommodations” an impediment to faith while it appeals profoundly to another as a sure and shining pathway to God.

(1) Gen. iii. 15; Rom. xvi. 20. (2) Gen. xxii. 18; xvii. 21; xxviii. 14;

We confine our study of predictive prophecy to passages of the Old Testament which concern themselves with fore-announcements concerning the promised Messiah. There are many passages found in the Old Testament which are interpreted as predictions concerning the Jews and other nations which furnish interesting material for study, but it is beyond our province to give any consideration to these. The same is true to an even greater degree of those passages found in Daniel and the Apocalypse, and other books of the Old and New Testaments, which are the occasion of endless discussions concerning the second coming of Christ and the end of the world. Not all perhaps will agree with me in declaring that the truth of predictive prophecy as a whole stands or falls with the truth of Messianic prophecy. Frederick the Great once demanded of his royal chaplain what was the strongest single argument that could be adduced to prove the divine inspiration and truth of the Scriptures. "The Jews, your majesty, the Jews!" was his prompt reply. And we doubt not that not a few "pre-millenarians" could be found who would say that in confining our studies to Christ's first coming, we are omitting the most luminous of all proofs from prophecy that God has spoken to men when we omit all reference to passages in which they find so much that is edifying

xlix. 8-10; 1 Chron. v. 1-2; Is. xi. 1-10; Ps. lxxxix. 3, 4; Jer. xxiii. 5; Ps. ii. 7; compare with Rom. ix. 5; vii. 14; Rev. v. 5; Acts xiii. 23; Gal. iii. 16. (3) Gen. xlix. 10; Dan. ii. 44; ix. 24, 25; compare with well-known facts of history. (4) Mal. iii. 1; iv. 5; Is. xl. 3; compare with Luke i. 76; Matt. iii. 1-3; xvii. 10-12. (5) Micah v. 2; compare with John vii. 42; Matt. ii. 1-6. (6) Is. vii. 14; compare with Matt. i. 22, 23; Luke i. 26-35. (7) Deut. xviii. 15; compare with Acts, Chap. iii; Matt. viii. 28; John iv. 25, 26; John vi. 14. (8) Ps. cx. 4; Zech. vi. 12; compare with Heb. v. 5, 6; vii. 24, 25. (9) Is. ix. 6, 7; Jer. xxiii. 5, 6; Dan. ii. 44; vii. 13, 14, 18; compare with Luke ii. 11; i. 30-33; Mark i. 14; Luke xvii. 20, 21; Rom. xi. 26, 27; 1 Cor. xv. 25; Rev. xi. 15. (10) Is. xi. 1-10; xlix. 6; xiii. 1-14; compare with Luke ii. 30-32; Acts xxviii. 28; x. 45, 46; Matt. xii. 17-21. (11) Zech. ix. 9; Ps. cxviii. 26; compare with Matt. xx. 1-5; Luke xix. 37, 38. (12) Zech. xi. 12, 13; Ps. xli. 9; lix. 25; cix. 8; compare with Matt. xxvi. 14, 15; xxvii. 9, 10; John xiii. 18; Acts i. 16-20. (13) Zech. xii. 10; Ps. xxii. 1-18; lix. 21; Ex. xii. 46; Ps. xxxiv. 20; Is. liii. 9; compare with John xix. 33-37; Rev. i. 7; Matt. xxvii. 33-48; Luke xxiii. 33-35; John xix. 23, 24; Matt. xxvii. 57-60. (14) Is. liii. 5-8; Dan. ix. 26; compare with 1 Cor. xv. 3; 2 Cor. v. 21; Heb. ix. 28; 1 Pet. ii. 24; Gal. iii. 13; 1 John iii. 5; 1 Pet. iii. 18; 1 John ii. 2. (15) Ps. xvi. 9, 10; compare with Acts ii. 30, 31; xiii. 32-35.

concerning Christ's second coming. But in spite of the presence in the Old Testament of certain remarkable predictive warnings given the Jews of old as to the consequences of sin and disobedience, and the fulfilment of these predictive warnings in the subsequent history of the scattered nation that became a byword and hissing in many lands, and in spite of numerous references in the New Testament to the second coming of Christ, we are content to let the question of predictive prophecy rest with the truth of Messianic prophecy. If the Messiah of the Old Testament and the Christ of the New Testament are not one and the same person, there is no predictive prophecy anywhere; if they are one and the same person, not only is predictive prophecy an established fact but it becomes one of the most luminous of all the pathways that lead to God—to faith in God as "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" and as the Father of those whom Christ has made to be sons of God.

## *2. Different Interpretations of Messianic Passages*

Commentators differ very widely in their interpretation of the so-called Messianic passages found in the Old Testament. Some of them have written as if their effort was to place a Messianic interpretation on every passage that could possibly bear it, as if it were a mark of superior spiritual discernment and a sign of marked exegetical skill to find references to the Messiah in almost every page of the Old Testament, and especially in places where the average reader would not discover it. This has done much to bring the "argument from prophecy" into disrepute. At the opposite extreme from this method of interpretation is that of Hugo Grotius, the great Arminian jurist and commentator of Holland, whose general position was: never introduce the supernatural where the natural could account for things; never place a predictive and Messianic interpretation upon a passage that can be explained with reasonable probability as referring to an event or person near at hand; never find a supernatural prediction except where you are compelled to do so in order to give a reasonable explanation of the statements made. It is possible for one to

sympathise thoroughly with this position of Grotius, and yet differ widely from him in applying the principle involved; for he found so little of the supernatural in the Old Testament that he is ranked by many as anti-evangelical and rationalistic in his interpretation of the Bible. Many feel compelled to introduce the supernatural, and find, or think they find, unmistakable predictions of the Messiah where Grotius found no such references himself.

In Edersheim's "Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah," there is a list of no less than four hundred and fifty-six passages found in the Old Testament which have been interpreted as of Messianic significance. This may represent one extreme, while the naturalistic school of interpreters represent the other extreme and exclude all distinct and specific predictions of the Messiah from the Old Testament. Between these two extremes modern Bible scholars have found a method of mediation.

The three methods of studying and interpreting Messianic prophecy may be called the naturalistic, the theological and the historical. The first of these denies that there is anything supernatural in prophecy; the Old Testament contains no predictions. There are foreshadowings and forecastings of some future events, such as can be made by moral students of the times, but nothing that is beyond man's natural abilities to forecast. And the so-called "fulfilments" are, one and all, nothing more than an accommodation of the language of the prophets to later events. The utterances that are called Messianic predictions are all explained as referring exclusively to events near at hand, or else as being of such a general nature that they can be made to refer to other persons or events with as much propriety as to Christ and the events pertaining to his Kingdom. The second method of interpreting prophecy is at the other extreme from the first; it emphasises the supernatural element, and regards the predictions of a coming Messiah in connection with their fulfilment as one of the strongest credentials provided by God to establish the Messiahship of Christ, and appeals to the fact that it is so used in the New Testament. The third method mediates between these two.

As against the first it recognises a supernatural as well as a human element in prophecy, but as compared with the second it makes relatively more of the human element in prophecy and less of the divine than the second does, and finds in the varied and conflicting interpretations of predictive prophecy that have characterised the history of the Church a proof of ambiguity that warns against attaching too strong apologetic value to this argument. The last two are both held by eminent theologians of the Church and represent respectively the older and the more modern method of treating the subject of prophecy.

The historical method of studying and interpreting prophecy adopted by modern Bible scholars, approaching the subject entirely from the Old Testament itself, studies it as a growth in the light of history, regards each and every book of prophecy as, first of all, a message of the prophet to his own times, and hence magnifies the moral and spiritual element, and finds its chief significance in the immediate moral purpose which it served in rebuking sin and enforcing righteousness. Even when the prophet is talking of the future, he is describing not so much what certainly shall be as what ought to be, and what, under proper moral conditions, will be. It is plain to see that this method of treating prophecy makes more of the human and relatively less of the supernatural element in it; makes more of it as a present moral message and less as a prediction of the future. It studies and interprets each prophetic message in the light of the context and the historical conditions that called it forth, rather than in the light of any use made of it in the New Testament. It allies itself most readily with that theory of inspiration which admits the possibility of historical, chronological, scientific, and other errors of like nature in the Bible, and which magnifies the moral and the spiritual truth in the Bible as that which alone is of transcendent importance. Much of what is called Messianic, though finding its highest fulfilment in Christ, is regarded as capable of application to other characters before Christ, to other servants of Jehovah, prophets, priests, and kings, and to the Jewish nation as a whole.

This theory does not discard predictive prophecy, but, as compared with the traditional method of interpreting and using prophecy, it regards the element of prediction as of such a nature as to make it unwise to rely upon it as an argument of great value for our day. The varied and conflicting interpretations of predictive prophecy that have characterised different groups of believers in all periods of church history are a proof of its ambiguity and are regarded as a warning against staking the truth of the Christian religion on any argument based on predictive prophecy.

While there are in the Old Testament many prophetic references to an ideal coming Messiah and to a suffering servant of Jehovah which apply in a remarkable way to Christ, it is felt by those who adopt this method of interpreting prophecy that the ethical and spiritual teachings of the prophets and of Christ furnish an argument so free from ambiguity and so irresistible in its appeal to all reasonable minds that the entire emphasis in the "argument from prophecy" for our day should be placed at this point. All that is of higher moral and spiritual value in prophecy culminates, finds its perfect "fulfilment," in Christ, the greatest of the prophets, whose highest prophetic credentials are not to be found in his predictions of future events but in the moral and spiritual truths that he uttered. The "argument from prophecy" that places its whole emphasis here will never need to be remanded to the background of Apologetics in any generation. It is because the emphasis has not been placed here that there has come in our day a reaction against the argument that bears this designation.

### *3. Reaction Against the Argument from Predictive Prophecy*

In spite of the reasonableness of a certain amount of information concerning the future being imparted by God to those who are to be the agents in the carrying out of his programme—and in spite of the fact that there are numerous statements in the Old and New Testaments which are connected with each other as prediction and fulfilment—there have been such disputations and differences of opinion when it comes to the interpretation of these predictive passages that the re-

sult has been that the argument from predictive prophecy has lost its former high standing among the evidences of Christianity, and has largely disappeared from modern treatises on Christian apologetics. Some, on the other hand, have gone so far as to claim that the predictions of Scripture are not only clear and definite and possessed of the highest evidential value, but that they constitute a sort of map for the discovery and location of all the great leading events of history, particularly those foreshadowing the second coming of Christ. Among the causes which have brought about the reaction against the argument from prophecy this exaggerated claim for, and excessive confidence in, Biblical predictions, has perhaps been most influential. And, next to that, is a tendency manifest among modern Bible scholars to extend the principle of "accommodation" to a larger number of New Testament references to Old Testament Scriptures than had hitherto been considered legitimate.

Concerning the second coming of Christ, which many of the early Christians erroneously thought would take place in their lifetime, there have been three interpretations among Christians who are equally devout and equally anxious rightly to interpret the mind of the Spirit as revealed in the Scriptures. Premillenarians believe that Christ will return in visible bodily form and, binding Satan in chains, will establish here on the earth a visible kingdom out of the entire body of resurrected saints, over which he will reign a thousand years. They interpret as definite, exact, and literal many references to Christ's second advent which post-millenarians interpret figuratively and metaphorically. These latter believe that the millennium will precede Christ's second coming, and consist of a long extended period of progress and prosperity, at the termination of which Christ will come in visible bodily form and that his coming will be the signal for the resurrection of the dead which will be followed by the general and final judgment of all men. Between these two views the Church has been long divided. And then there is a large and constantly increasing number of Christians in the present day who do not believe that there will be any definite visible bodily return

of Christ; nor do they believe that there will be any resurrection of the dead bodies of men nor any general judgment of men other than that which takes place when each man dies and presents himself in the spirit before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account of the deeds done in the body. It is no part of our purpose to give the reasons for or against any one of these views. We only mention them to show how and why it is that predictive prophecy as a pathway to God is beclouded by doubts as to its real meaning and does not seem to appeal to the modern mind as it did to men of a former generation. But we feel confident that if any one familiar with the life of Christ will read all the Old Testament passages concerning the promised and expected Messiah, and compare them with the Christ who has come, he cannot fail to be convinced that the Old Testament contains divine fore-announcements of the coming of the divine-human Christ.

#### 4. *"Accommodations" of Prophetic Language Distinguished from Fulfilments*

The most common and expressive formula with which Messianic quotations from the Old Testament are introduced in the New is, "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, etc." This phrase is sometimes applied to passages in the Old Testament which cannot be regarded as predictions, and the New Testament "application" cannot be called a "fulfilment" in the ordinary sense of that term. This free use of the term shows that any accommodation or appropriation of an Old Testament passage to a New Testament use was called a "fulfilment." J. S. Palfrey in his book on "The Relation Between Judaism and Christianity," published many years ago, endeavours to prove by numerous citations from classic, Syriac, and Jewish authors that the common practice of writers at that time was to call that a "fulfilment" which was regarded as nothing more than an illustration or application. He takes the position that the New Testament writers generally quote the Old Testament passages not so much as predictions of Christ and Christianity as statements of truth which receive new illustrations and applications in

Christianity. While this may be true of many individual passages cited it does not seem altogether satisfactory thus to explain numerous other passages which seem to be unquestionably predictions of definite New Testament events fulfilled in the life of the Son of Man.

We cite here three instances of accommodation to show how the New Testament writers appropriate or apply to their uses the language of the Old Testament in so far as it suggests itself to them as appropriate and expressive of their ideas or of the facts they narrate; just as we now use the Bible as a thesaurus from which to draw expressive phrases to represent our ideas or feelings, or to describe current events, and this without much regard to the original context or the circumstances that called forth the words quoted. The difference is they called it a "fulfilment" of the ancient words while we would not use that term in referring to the Biblical words quoted. As an example of "accommodation" we may refer to Psalm lxxviii. 2, "I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old." In Matthew xiii. 35, it is said that Jesus employed parables in teaching in order that these words spoken by the prophet might be "fulfilled." Again, in Jeremiah xxxi. 15, there is an allusion to Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted. In Matthew ii. 17, it is said that this prophecy was "fulfilled" in the weeping that took place after Herod's murder of the innocents. In Hosea xi. 1, are the words: "Out of Egypt have I called my son." In Matthew ii. 15, it is said that the infant Jesus abode in Egypt in order that this prophetic word might be "fulfilled." But there is no evidence that the prophet had this event of the Gospel history in mind, or that the prophetic passage was in any way intended to refer to it. There is no way to explain this peculiar use of Old Testament Scripture for New Testament purposes that is more satisfactory than to regard it as an accommodation of words called forth by certain circumstances or events to other circumstances or events which were not at all in the mind of the speaker or writer who first used them.

Our belief that certain Old Testament statements and later

events sustain the relation of prediction and fulfilment to each other is not based on the fact that such relation is recognised in the New Testament—though there are some who affirm that this is the case and take the position that only that portion of the Old Testament is Messianic which is distinctly affirmed to be such in the New Testament. On the contrary it can be well maintained that if no New Testament writers had ever compared the life of Christ as revealed in the New Testament history with the Old Testament prophecies to see whether or not there were predictions and fulfilments—if the discovery and setting forth of these marvellous correspondences between the Christ of History and the Messiah of the Old Testament had been made in our own day for the first time—they would be “fulfilments” just as truly as they were in the first century when Christ and the apostles first called attention to them. Unless a given statement as made in the Old Testament was when originally uttered a real prediction, no later New Testament use of that statement can possibly turn it into a prediction.

While it is true that it is the person or event foreknown which is the cause of the foreknowledge and of the prediction, and not the foreknowledge and prediction the cause of the person or event coming into existence, there are some instances in which the words, “This was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet saying” would seem to imply that in a sense the prediction was the cause of the event—as if Christ had taken the Old Testament prophecy as a kind of map or guide or programme of his life, and that his main reason for doing these various things recorded was because it had been foreannounced, or had been previously ordered by the heavenly oracles that such and such things should be done by him who should come to fill the office of Messiah—as if he were doing his utmost to make himself fit the ideal character which he had found described in the ancient sacred books of his people, and this for the purpose of securing their recognition of him as Messiah. But it is impossible to reconcile such an explanation of these words with any worthy conception of the moral character of Christ, not to speak of his

divinity. We therefore conclude that the formula, "That it might be fulfilled," is one that simply calls attention to a certain correspondence and agreement between what Christ said or did and the passage cited in the Old Testament. As to whether the agreement recognised by the New Testament writer is one simply of accommodation, or a special application of general truth, or a literal fulfilment of a divine prediction, that is a point which can be determined only by carefully examining the passage quoted in the light of its context and the historical circumstances that called it forth.

The question with us here and now, however, is not, how much or how little of the Old Testament has specific reference to Jesus as the Messiah, but rather, are there real and specific predictions of the Messiah anywhere to be found in the Old Testament. Even one such sure prediction would prove the presence of a supernatural element in the Old Testament. But there are, in the judgment of the great body of Bible readers and students of all ages, not one simply, but many references to a coming Messiah scattered throughout the Old Testament. Among the four hundred and fifty-six Messianic passages enumerated by Edersheim, seventy-five are found in the Pentateuch, two hundred and forty-three in the Prophets, and one hundred and thirty-eight in the Hagiographa. But if even one per cent of this number can bear the tests of fair-minded criticism, and be adjudged as genuine Messianic predictions, then the divine inspiration of Old Testament prophecy is securely established and the New Testament Christ is most unmistakably foreshadowed in the Old.

Dr. James Martineau, the most distinguished of modern English Unitarian divines, has declared that the apostles, in applying to their Master the epithet of Messiah, did so in error, and thus started a false theory as to his person, and in so doing they put upon him "the first deforming mask, the first robe of hopeless disguise under which the real personality of Jesus of Nazareth disappeared from sight," and that when the New Testament writers applied to him so-called "Messianic passages" of the Old Testament they "degraded the sublimest religious literature of the ancient world into a book of magic

and a tissue of riddles.”<sup>1</sup> Unitarians conceive it to be their sacred duty and high mission to remove this “deforming mask,” this “robe of disguise,” and make the real and true Jesus of Nazareth to live and speak again in the modern world. Of course, as Dr. Bruce remarks, this view will be endorsed only by those who regard the Messianic hope of Israel as a “fond delusion and romantic dream.” He furthermore says very truly that if, after the disciples came to regard their Master as the Christ, they discovered, or thought they discovered, here and there, correspondences between facts in his life and certain prophetic texts, they should take delight in pointing these out, they would be doing, to say the least, only what was very natural and altogether innocent.<sup>2</sup> We certainly find it in our day not only natural and innocent but altogether edifying to discover and proclaim correspondences between present-day men and things, and various utterances found in the Old and New Testament Scriptures. Nor does the admission that many of these “correspondences” between the Christ of the New Testament and the Old Testament passages cited are mere “accommodations” mean that there are not, over and above the Scriptures so used, other definite fore-announcements of a coming Messiah that found their real and true fulfilment in Christ.

### III

#### THE MORAL SIGNIFICANCE AND VALUE OF PROPHECY

Suppose it could be shown that there are no real and truly definite predictions in the writings of the Hebrew prophets, would it follow that there is no evidence left that God has spoken to and through the prophets, and that the “argument from prophecy” must be dropped from apologetics? By no means. An argument at once potent and of permanent value remains.

Matthew Arnold, although a man of letters rather than a

<sup>1</sup> “Seat of Authority in Religion,” p. 329.

<sup>2</sup> “Apologetics,” p. 369.

theologian, and a freethinker rather than an evangelical believer, was a profound student of the Bible, and no portion of the Bible did he more earnestly study and ardently admire than the writings of the Old Testament prophets, notably Isaiah. His definition of the God of the Bible naturally led to his placing "a passion for righteousness" first among the notable attributes of the Old Testament prophets: "The God of the Bible and of Christianity is *the Eternal, not ourselves, that makes for righteousness.*" But "the Eternal that makes for righteousness" must needs do his work in time through men chosen for the purpose. These men we call prophets, preachers of righteousness, and their most notable characteristic is, or ought to be, a passion for righteousness. We wish to inquire into the significance of this dominant attribute of the prophets, this "passion for righteousness" that so mightily moved them, and also into two other attributes that are closely associated with it—viz., their optimism and their universalism. If we are to find in the study of the Hebrew prophets a path that will lead men to God in our day and be darkened by no differences of opinion as to its value, it will be by noting in their writings the many passages that burn with a passion for righteousness, that glow with an optimism that cannot be quenched, and with a catholicity and universalism that reveals Jehovah as the God not of the Jews only but of the whole earth.

### *I. The Prophetic Passion for Righteousness*

The passion for righteousness which characterised the Hebrew prophets throughout the whole Old Testament dispensation is perhaps their most unfailing divine credential. It was, as it were, a divine fire forever burning in their souls, a holy zeal that consumed but did not destroy them. It manifested itself in denunciations against prevailing corruptions and against the many sins that so easily and continually beset the chosen people, and also in dire warnings of the terrible consequences that would follow both to the individual and the nation if these sins were persisted in. Their passionate and pathetic pleadings with their people to give up their wicked

ways and walk in the ways of Jehovah and keep his commandments, which were always proclaimed as righteous both in what was prohibited and in what was enjoined; their scathing rebukes whenever, in spite of prophetic entreaties and promises, the people plunged into new forms of vice with a high hand and an outstretched arm; the moral heroism with which they delivered their messages just as they received them from Jehovah, without fear or favour, even though like Jeremiah they were cast into the miry dungeon; their intense moral earnestness, their utter self-forgetfulness in the presence of danger and death, their unflinching fidelity in the execution of their divine commissions, their unwavering faith in the moral order of the world, and their uniform vindication of Jehovah's holiness and righteousness—that is what we mean by the prophetic passion for righteousness.

Take, for example, these passionate words found in the first chapter of Isaiah, and which are in a sense representative of the entire series of prophetic discourses which bear the name of this greatest of the prophets :

“Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the Lord hath spoken; I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters; they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger. . . . Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: but if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.”

Take, again, these pathetic words from Jeremiah, which reveal not only his passion for righteousness, but the divine source of his moral heroism :

"Thou therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them. . . . They shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee. . . . Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the Lord. For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, that can hold no water. . . . Hear, O earth: behold, I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not hearkened to my words, nor to my law, but rejected it. . . . But if ye will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride; and mine eyes shall weep sore, and run down with tears, because the Lord's flock is carried away captive. . . . Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong; that useth his neighbour's service without wages, and giveth him not for his work."<sup>1</sup>

These are but sparks of the fiery passion for righteousness that burned in the bosoms of the prophets of old; and it was generally while mightily moved with this holy passion that prophecies of a Messianic age and kingdom were uttered by them.

## 2. *Prophetic and Priestly Ideals of Righteousness Distinguished*

One of the most striking phases of this prophetic passion for righteousness was the strong emphasis they placed upon personal purity and righteousness and obedience to the commandments of God as compared with mere sacrificial and ceremonial righteousness. Here we have the prophetic and priestly types of piety contrasted. The priests were concerned about the ritual and its proper performance. They were, as compared with the prophets, poor revealers of God to men. The prophets recognised the place of sacrifice and ceremony in religion; but when these things were unduly stressed in

<sup>1</sup> See Sir George Adam Smith's "Jeremiah," Chapter VIII on "God, Man and the New Covenant."

the religious life of the people, it was for the prophets with their passion for personal righteousness to utter their warnings and denunciations. It was such conditions as these that called forth from Jeremiah the memorable words: "To what purpose cometh there to me incense from Sheba, and the sweet cane from a far country? Your burnt offerings are not acceptable, nor your sacrifice sweet unto me." Similarly Isaiah: "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth; they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them." "I desired mercy," says Hosea, "and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings"; and the same thought is in Amos: "I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them; neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts."

These were the conditions that called forth the great prophets and created within them their passion for righteousness. The priests with their intense zeal for ceremonial righteousness and sacrificial forms could never have met these conditions. It was these moral crises in Israel's history that called forth from the prophets predictions concerning the coming Messianic dispensation that should forever abolish the priesthood and give a place of permanent subordination to ceremonial righteousness and exalt spiritual religion and personal righteousness to that place of prominence which it now holds in the ethical religion of Christ. The prophetic office is, in many of its most important aspects, continued in the New Testament dispensation, and every true preacher must now, as in former times, have a passion for righteousness burning in his bosom like a holy fire which when once kindled never goes out while

life lasts—that fire which, when once kindled in a man, enables him to kindle fire in others. Writings which glow with this holy passion for righteousness, as do the writings of the Old Testament prophets, need no higher or stronger proof of their inspiration.

### *3. Prophetic Optimism*

Not only did the Hebrew prophets have a passion for righteousness, but they were intensely optimistic. They believed in a better day coming. It would have been natural for men whose eyes were so quick to discern vice and corruption, and who saw so much of idolatry and impurity and oppression, to grow pessimistic; but their hope and faith in the future were as strong as their zeal for righteousness in the midst of a wicked and perverse generation. No matter how dark and gloomy the present and the immediate future might be, the prophetic eyes penetrated into the more distant future and saw righteousness triumphing over sin, and with the return of righteousness there would come peace, prosperity, and enlargement. No threnody of poet or lamentation of prophet was ever so mournful that it was not lighted up somewhere by a gracious ray of hope. And that hope was always connected with a coming Messiah. At his coming God would enter into a new covenant with his people, when his laws that had so long been enforced from without would be written in their hearts. But for this optimism their hearts would utterly have failed them. Many an awful crisis in moral corruption and political degeneracy did Israel pass through when the nation would have become extinct but for that prophetic optimism which saw a coming Messiah and sung its sweet song of hope: "It is better farther on." The prophet whose passion for righteousness is divine in its origin will always be inspired by a heaven-born optimism. A pessimist can never lead men to God or reveal God to men.

### *4. Prophetic Universalism*

Another notable characteristic of the Hebrew prophets was their universalism, their recognition of the fact that the moral

and spiritual blessings that pertained to them were designed ultimately for all mankind. The Jews as a race were religiously narrow and selfish, bigoted and exclusive; but not so their religious leaders, the prophets. These seers saw farther than the people did and more than the people did. They recognised that Israel's election was not simply to national blessings and privileges, but first of all to service; that the nation's true and high vocation was to carry the knowledge of the one true spiritual God and his ethical laws to all the nations of the earth. The prophets saw, however, that another dispensation must come before that high calling could be realised; and so here again it was the coming Messiah who should lead the nation forth upon its larger world-wide mission of blessing to the whole race of men. The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw was also seen by Micah and other prophets: "It shall come to pass in the last days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths; for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people; and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord." This universalism of the ancient Hebrew prophets, no less than their optimism was always connected in their minds in its ultimate realisation, with a coming ideal person who should be at once a prophet, priest, and king—the Messiah. The prophet who has a message for all times must not only be possessed of an intense passion for righteousness, but must be an optimist and universalist, must feel that a better day is coming, and not to him and his nation only but to all mankind. And no man thinks and feels and talks that way unless God is in him and speaking through him.



CHAPTER FIFTEEN  
THROUGH CHRIST TO GOD



## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### THROUGH CHRIST TO GOD

“Through nature to God,” “through man to God,” and “through Christ to God” are three ascending steps in the ladder by which we climb to the perfect vision of God. Although we can see more of God in man than we can in physical nature, and more of God in Christ than we can in either physical nature or human nature, it is well for us to remember that Christ, the most perfect of men, who as the divine-human one dwelt in the very presence of God, communed with the Father in and through nature, and made it the vehicle for teaching many of the most beautiful truths ever taught mankind concerning spiritual religion. His nature parables are full of God; and not least among the services he rendered to men in revealing God to them was to show them how truly nature reveals the wisdom and goodness and love of the Heavenly Father. It was from him pre-eminently that we learned to look “through nature to God.”

In like manner we need to remember that it is from Christ more than from any other source that we have learned of the dignity and nobility of man’s nature. It is from Christ that we learned more than from any other source that it is not the accident of wealth or social rank or political power or family name or any such thing that gives man his dignity and nobility. The humblest and poorest of men were just as worthy of consideration in his esteem as those whom the world counted great. In each and every man he saw a child of the heavenly Father. And when he took man’s nature upon himself and incarnated his very Deity in our humanity in order to reveal God to men, he gave the crowning proof that man’s nature is a channel and pathway to God as well as from God. But for what Christ has done for man and taught us concerning

man, that which we found of highest value in travelling "through man to God" would have been lacking in our argument.

We come now to a subject which invites us to study, along with the natural that which is supernatural, and along with the human that which is superhuman.

## I

## GOD AS REVEALED BY CHRIST

"No man knoweth the Son but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him." These significant words found in the Gospel of Matthew teach us that it is from and through Christ alone that we can receive the perfect revelation of God.

The method of setting forth the life of Christ found in the first three Gospels, commonly called the "Synoptists," is (as we have already pointed out in a previous chapter) to throw in the foreground his human personality in all its marvellous ethical qualities, and let the readers, as did the apostles, only by degrees make their inference and at length reach their conclusion that he is verily "the Christ, the Son of the living God." St. John's method is to place the announcement of his divine and eternal sonship in the beginning of the Gospel, and to show how consistent all the subsequently recorded facts of his life are with that high claim. If, without making in the beginning any dogmatic claims that the person of whom we write is divine, we can, by simply showing how he himself thought and spoke of God and how his wonderful uplifting, ethical influence has been felt in every sphere of human life, bring the reader to draw his own inference and conclusion that verily this man must be the Son of God, our method will probably prove the wisest and best in dealing with unbelievers. On the other hand, to strengthen and develop the faith of those who are already believers in his divinity, the method of John's Gospel is doubtless most effective. In the Synoptists we read most concerning what he said and did as the Son of Man; in John's Gospel we have a revelation of what he was

as shown by what he said and did as the Son of God. Studying all four Gospels we see how man and God meet in Christ.

### 1. *Christ's Doctrine of God*

What, now, let us ask, are the truths about God which are the peculiar and special revelation of Christ to the world? Whether disclosing them for the first time or completing the previous partial revelations of nature and of the Old Testament matters not, for in either case we owe the revelation in its fulness to Christ. Let us first name, without for the time being discussing, the most important and precious truths concerning God which we owe to Christ. We name these ten, and the fact that they have become thoroughly and universally familiar to the Christian world is all the greater proof of the effectiveness of Christ's revelation.

(1) God is Spirit—not merely spiritual, as if spirituality were one of his attributes, but God is Spirit; the very essence of his nature is Spirit. God is a personal Spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

(2) God is Life and the Life-Giver. "I am the way and the truth and the life." "I am come that ye might have life, and that ye might have it more abundantly." And the life that he brought is not that of the flesh, but that of the spirit. And all this he said because he himself had come from Him who was the fountain and source of all life.

(3) God is Light, the banisher of darkness. If ever any revelation of God made him luminous, that of Christ did; but it did more; it made him the luminary in our heavens never more to become invisible. It was not by throwing light on God, but by removing the clouds and revealing God in his own light that Christ rendered this great service and revealed God as the very Light of Light.

(4) God is the Father—first, in a sense that is real and true, the Father of every human being, and secondly, in a more important and precious sense, the Father of those human beings who, having accepted him by faith, are his obedient, loyal, and loving children, and, thirdly, the Father in the highest and truest sense of Jesus Christ.

(5) God is Love—love is the most central and essential attribute of his nature. Love is the moral dynamic in humanity, the greatest power on earth. Concerning God's power, as mere force, Christ has little to say; the reason is plain: he located God's omnipotence in his love—indeed, made all of his attributes expressions of love.

(6) God is a Servant as well as a Sovereign—his sovereignty manifests itself not primarily in power and what he exacts of men, but in infinite love for men and ceaseless service to men. "He that is greatest among you shall be servants of all." This ideal of greatness for man grew out of his interpretation of Divine Sovereignty in terms of service.

(7) God is Human—the divineness of man and the humanness of God are expressions suggested by Christ's words, which, rightly interpreted and safeguarded, serve well to define what God is as well as what man is. "He that seeth me seeth the Father," said Christ: "I and the Father are one." And this he said not to prove that he was like God and divine, but that God was like himself, and human in some real and true sense.

(8) God's providence in behalf of his children is minute and ceaseless, and while it concerns incidentally their material and temporal life, it is directed always and everywhere mainly toward their moral and spiritual good as its chief and final end. To get men rid of sin, to secure their highest holiness and largest usefulness, this is the aim and end of God's "special providence."

(9) In the unity of the Godhead there have been eternally three Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, so related to each other and to us that each is essentially immanent and active in the ongoing of the world.

(10) God's care and kingdom embrace not only the life that now is, but a larger, richer, and happier life that follows the death of the body. Christ brought life and immortality to light in and through his teachings and his resurrection from the dead.

Who, now, let us ask, can estimate the value and influence upon mankind of the revelation of these ten great truths about God? To say that they constitute a reinterpretation of God

is perhaps but half the truth. They are to such an extent a re-definition and reconstruction of the very idea of God, such an enlargement of the comprehensiveness of the nature and character of God, as to make us feel that up to this time mankind had been making their onward way in nothing more than a twilight—that the coming of this revelation of God was indeed and in truth the rising of the Sun of Righteousness.

In many points Christ reuttered truths concerning God that were already fully revealed. But here are ten particulars in which he has either reinterpreted and enlarged the conception of the Godhead as hitherto known, or else has revealed for the first time the nature and attributes of Deity in terms which so fully satisfy the mind and the heart of man as to make Christ's doctrine of God forever thereafter to be the world's accepted doctrine of Deity. Some of these great truths we have already discussed in this volume. Here and now we desire to call particular attention, even though it involves something of repetition, to three of the ten great truths concerning God which are here mentioned as the peculiar revelation of Jesus Christ.

## *2. The Fatherhood and Love of God*

We cannot too often mention or too strongly emphasise the fact that the first and perhaps greatest service which Christ has rendered to the human race is found in his revelation of God as a Father. In so doing he brought God near to man and made him a Being to be loved and adored rather than one simply to be feared and held in awe. The divine attribute which most fully defined the moral character of God before Christ came was holiness; but holiness had as its leading characteristic to the men of that day the idea of aloofness, separateness, not only from sin but from sinners. Jehovah was regarded by the world generally as a Sovereign whose leading attribute was unlimited power, and who was to be feared, adored, and worshipped with awe as one far removed from man, and more ready to punish than to bless. But it was reserved for Christ to teach men that sublimest and most welcome of all truths concerning God comprehended in the two

words "Fatherhood" and "Love." At the very beginning of the Gospels, in the Sermon on the Mount, Christ calls God our "Father" no less than sixteen times, and he continued to use this as his favourite designation for the divine Being. God is referred to as the Father no less than two hundred and fifty times in the entire New Testament. By teaching men to address their prayers to "Our Father" in heaven Christ gave a significance and a preciousness to prayer that it had never had before. In giving this new name to God, Christ did not depreciate any attribute that God was conceived of as possessing, but he ethicised, spiritualised, enriched, and ennobled all the divine attributes.

It is impossible to exaggerate the value to religion of this revelation of God as a Father which Christ has thus given to the world. The picture of God that is presented in the parable of the prodigal son has touched the heart of a sinful world as nothing else in all literature has ever touched it. This matchless piece of literature really ought to have been called the parable of the loving father rather than of the prodigal son. When Christ taught that God is love, and that he loves the whole world, and that he has so loved the world as to give his only-begotten and well-beloved Son that whosoever would believe in him might have eternal life, he at once and for all time to come transferred the point of emphasis in the world's idea of God from the attribute of power, where it had so long been, to the attribute of love. Henceforth love, not power, is sovereign among the attributes of God; but it is a love that is in itself unlimited in power, inseparable from holiness, and unceasing in its service for those who are loved. How important and precious is the revelation of God contained in these words: "For your Heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. *Therefore* seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you." "Make your Heavenly Father's will and the service of your fellow-man your delight, and your wants shall be his care." This conception of God transforms religion from a dreaded drudgery into a delightful duty. Philip truly said, "Show us the Father, and it sufficeth us"—and he might have

added, nothing less than the revelation of God as a Father can possibly suffice to satisfy the heart of man. The mind and the heart of man alike are restless until they find rest in the loving Fatherhood of the living God.

A well-known theologian of England, the late Dr. J. Agar Beet, is the author of a notable volume that bears the title, "Through Christ to God," in which he says:

"Examining his words as recorded in the four Gospels, we find that Christ spoke frequently and emphatically about a Father in heaven, the unseen Creator and Ruler of man and of the universe; and this conception moulded and coloured all his teaching. He spoke also of God as taking deep interest in man and as coming near to him to save and to bless, and as an object of man's trust and affection and a source of hope and joy. The same ideas underlie the entire New Testament. . . . The definite and somewhat complex conception of God so clearly portrayed on the many-coloured pages of the New Testament are altogether different from every conception of God set forth in the entire literature of the world except so far as later literature has been moulded by Christian teaching. It is a matter of simple historical fact that the New Testament embodies a complete revolution in man's conception of God. The only explanation of all the facts of the case is that this new conception of God came from the lips of the great Teacher at whose feet sat, immediately or meditately, all the writers of the New Testament."

### 3. *Sovereignty and Service*

Sovereignty among men has as a rule manifested itself in compelling men to serve the sovereign. Indeed ascending to the place of sovereignty has oftenest been won, in the first instance, by some man developing the power to so lead and rule over others as to compel them all to serve him; and one's maintaining the seat of sovereignty has generally depended upon the continuance of his power to compel his fellow men to serve him. Sovereignty so secured and so maintained develops hate and enmity on the part of those who are compelled by force to serve; and such sovereignty rests

on an insecure foundation. Not like this, Christ taught us, is the sovereignty of the Heavenly Father.

In teaching us that God was like himself and that he came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, Christ taught us that God was not only our Father to be honoured, loved and worshipped, but that he is like every true parent, a servant, our most loving and faithful and self-sacrificing servant, the servant of all men. "Although the truest name for God in his relation to his creatures," says Dr. W. N. Clarke, "is that of Father, he is nevertheless the servant as well as the Father to all his creatures. That he must be the great servant of the universe is evident as soon as we remember that from him proceed all the wisdom, power, love and patience that it needs or has ever needed. 'My father worketh until now,' said Christ. God is as actively at work in his universe to-day and all the days as he ever was in creating it, and his work is perpetual ministration. The universal sovereign is the universal servant; and, if he ceased to serve, the universe would cease to be." No other conception of Deity save that of Christ ever combined the sovereign and the servant in God. It is sovereignty dominated by love and the spirit of helpfulness that has at its command infinite power to perform its ceaseless labours of love. "He that would be greatest among you, let him be servant of all." This is the divine pathway to power among men even as it is with God.

## II

### GOD AS REVEALED IN CHRIST

But Christ has given, in what he was in himself as God incarnate, a more significant and profound revelation of the heavenly Father than he gave in what he said concerning God.

#### 1. *The Divine-Human Person*

Side by side with the profound and majestic sentence with which the first book in the Old Testament begins—"In the

beginning God created the heavens and the earth"—stands the opening sentence of the fourth Gospel which is probably the last in date of all the books found in the New Testament Canon: "In the beginning was the Word (Logos) and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. In him was life and the life was the light of men. This was the true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by Him. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." It is thus that the last of the inspired writers describes how "God hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son."

What now is the special significance, let us ask, of this term "Logos" when applied to Christ as the Word of God? Passing over for the time being the view of those who connect St. John's use of this term "Logos" with its use in the writings of Philo and the Alexandrian philosophy, we can give a "common sense" interpretation to it which makes of it an uncommonly significant and luminous term for describing the work of Christ, the personal Word, in revealing to men the mind and heart and will of the Heavenly Father. A word is the method or means by which one rational or spiritual being conveys his thoughts and feelings to another and also by which he executes his will. Words are outward expressions of inner thoughts, ideas, feelings, volitions. In calling Christ the "Word of God," the New Testament means to teach that he is the visible and audible Expression of the mind and heart of God. He is the method or means by which the Father conveys to man his thoughts and feelings. Christ is the perfect revealer of God the Father to man. God executes his will by a word, the word of power. We say that "God the Father plans, God the Son executes, and God the Holy Ghost applies." If God the Son is he who executes the plans and purposes of the triune Godhead in the creation, redemption and evangelisation of the world, it is quite an intelligible and appropriate designation to call him the personal

Word of God. Such seems to be the significance and explanation of this term as applied to Christ.

We may say, then, that, "the divine Logos became the incarnate Logos in order that he might become the revealer of the Father. His 'revelation value' lay in this, that by him divine love was made audible and visible. The Father, struggling to express himself, found utterance in Jesus. Jesus was to the mind of the Father what a word is to the mind of man—the vehicle of expression and communication." Signs and symbols are means of communication between individuals; but they are at best imperfect instruments or channels of thought. Articulate words alone convey ideas accurately and perfectly. What articulate words are to signs and symbols as means of conveying thoughts, such is Christ, the personal Word, as compared with all other methods employed by God to reveal himself to the world. The term "Logos" thus interpreted in its application to Christ, ceases to be, as it is to many, an ambiguous term, veiled in mystery, but becomes at once an intelligible, simple, and luminous term describing Christ as the revealer of the Father in Heaven.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. *The Incarnation*

When Christ said: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father," he was not trying to define who and what he himself was, but rather, as the context plainly shows, who and what God is. These words are generally used to prove that Christ was Godlike and divine. Should they not rather be used to prove that God is Christlike and in some real and true sense human—that there is humanity in God as well as divinity in man? "In the creation," some one has said, "man was made

<sup>1</sup> Instead of the author of the fourth Gospel getting his conception and use of the Logos from Philo, says Dr. G. P. Fisher, it is much more in keeping with the facts to say that Philo's conception of the Logos was derived from the Old Testament and the Apocryphal writings. Mingled with Philo's use of the term are found conceptions of the Logos derived from Plato. In the Gospel, the Logos is personal. In Philo, Logos usually signifies the Platonic idea of reason, which idea is absent from the Gospel. "No Greek speculations respecting the divine nature," says Harnack, "had any influence on the Johannine theology. St. John's Logos has little more in common with the Logos of Philo than the name." (See Fisher's "Grounds of Theistic and Christian Belief," pp. 284-5.)

in God's image; in the incarnation God was made in man's image." In the person of Christ the divine and human unite as nowhere else; and it was that which was genuinely human in Jesus as well as that which was truly divine in him that made him to be, in his person as well as by his words, the most perfect revealer of God. That he was the eternal Son of God, the express image of the person of the Father, and possessed of the fulness of the Godhead bodily are but different statements found in the New Testament which declares his real and true deity. But the Gospel narrative shows that it was when he was most truly and genuinely human rather than when he was most mysteriously divine that he most noticeably drew men to him and influenced them to believe in God and in himself as the Messiah. Christ was never more truly human than when he died on the cross, and yet it was while witnessing his sublimely human suffering and death that the centurion looking on was led to exclaim: "Truly this was the Son of God." In like manner Christ said: "And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me," and he might, perhaps, have truly added, "And I, if I be not lifted up in suffering and death on the cross, cannot draw all men unto me." "He closed his eyes to show us God."

It was the manhood of Christ, with all its human limitations, not less than his divinity, that made him God's best medium for revealing himself to the world. Dr. George A. Gordon has developed this point at some length in his volume titled "Through Man to God," where he says: "The greatest thing that we know is man; the greatest man that we know is Jesus Christ. When, therefore, we hear Christ say, 'He that hath seen me hath seen the Father,' we have a guide to the heart of the Eternal of infinite moment. . . . In Jesus we have man at his highest, our humanity carried to its best. The method of approach to God in this text implies an ascent through man to God and also a descent of God in man. The ascent to man through God receives its highest expression in Jesus Christ. Jesus stands for a method of revelation. The supreme path of God is through the humanity of Jesus, and the perfect humanity of Jesus supplies the ideal path. As

the foothills lead to ever higher ranges until the sovereign summit of vision is at last reached, so the revelations of the prophets lead to the one supreme and perfect revelation of Jesus. There is nothing in all the universe to account for Jesus unless at the heart of the universe there is a love equal to his. The cause must always equal the effect; Jesus is not self-created; he himself points backward to his origin in the Eternal." "The incarnation," says Dr. Newman Smyth, "may be viewed as the realisation in space and time of God's eternal humanness—the eternal humanness of God's nature is objectified and realised in the person of Christ." The incarnation enables God on his part to be more to the human race than he could be without it. It is because Christ is human and brings to us the eternal humanness of God that God in Christ means so much more to the world than God before Christ, or God without Christ, could possibly mean.

The Christ of the Bible, the doctrine of the incarnation, or the divine-human person of the Redeemer, furnishes the strongest credential of all in proof of a divine element in the Bible. Let men differ as they may about the inspiration of the Bible, and the proportion of the human and the divine in it, they all agree—at least all who recognise anything as divine,—that the voice of God speaks to the race in and through the person of Jesus Christ. Not only is he the most perfect man that has ever appeared in the history of the world, but the evidence that he is more than a man is so great that it is more unreasonable to deny than to admit his divinity. The grandest force in the world to-day is the personal influence of Jesus. One might as well say that a mere man could have created the world and all things therein as to affirm that Christianity and all that it represents in history and in the world to-day has emanated from a mere man. Every feature of Christ's character and work bears the impress of its divine origination. Others as well as Goethe have found reason for believing and saying that, "If ever the divine appeared on earth, it was certainly in the person of Jesus." The divine has appeared, and Christ is the divinest of all the divine that has appeared. He is the very soul of the Bible,

and his all-pervading presence in it, especially in the New Testament, imparts to it divine authority.

"There has been a great deal of discussion and hot debate," Dr. Lyman Abbott once said, "concerning the relation of Jesus Christ to the Infinite and Eternal. We do not know—at least I do not know—enough to define that relation, but we do know enough to define his relation to us. That definition may be very briefly given in the following words: The supremest work of God is man whom he has made in his own image. The supremest revelation, therefore, of God is that afforded by the life and character of man. The supremest ideal of humanity is Jesus Christ. Therefore the supremest revelation of God to man is that to be found in the life and character of Jesus Christ. What we celebrate on Christmas is not merely the birth of the Christ-child, symbol of all innocent childhood; we celebrate a new unveiling of God to humanity, the dwelling of God in humanity. We celebrate the day when the love of God dawned on the world, and the fear of the gods began slowly and sullenly to give way before the coming of the New day. Every year Christmas repeats its message: Fear God no more; he brings liberty to the enslaved, light to the despairing, and purer joy to the glad-hearted. He is the Comforter of the sorrowing, the Physician of the sick, the Healer of the sinful, the Friend and Companion of man. When I am asked 'Is Jesus Christ God?' I reply, 'God is more than the sum of all his manifestations. Jesus Christ is one of his manifestations, but God is more than Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is God manifest in the flesh, and God entering into that flesh in order that he may enter into the whole of humanity. He is God in man. I believe that God came into Christ and filled Christ full of himself in order that Christ might come into us and fill us full of himself.' "

### III

#### GOD AS REVEALED THROUGH CHRIST

But God has been revealed not only in Christ and by Christ; he has been and is still revealed to men through Christ. This

revelation of him is no less important and vital than the two revelations already considered.

### *1. Through the Human Jesus to the Divine Christ*

Suppose a man says to you that he cannot understand how Christ can be God if he is a real man; and therefore, believing in his manhood, he cannot say that he believes in the Deity of Christ—how are we to deal with such a one? I can only tell you how I would deal with him. I would tell him that he is in the state of mind that the Apostles of our Lord were in when they first became his disciples, and they remained in his fellowship for over two years before any one of them declared his faith in what we may call the divinity of our Lord. I would ask him to follow and study Christ in one of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark or Luke), which are supposed to give the events of Christ's life in their approximate historical and chronological order. These gospels do not represent the Apostles as thinking of him in terms of deity as the Son of God, until, towards the close of his ministry in the vicinity of Cæsarea Philippi, we find Peter answering the question of our Lord as to what he and the other Apostles thought of him by declaring that he was "The Christ, the Son of the Living God." Now our Lord could have told them this, and given a credal statement concerning himself the first day he called them into service and fellowship. But he preferred that they should reach this conviction and faith by being with him and seeing his life and work and spirit, and hearing him speak from day to day. Arrived at in this way, in the school of experience, the confession of their faith meant infinitely more to them and to Christ than if they had been taught a formula of words the most perfect, and had been instructed to commit it to memory.

There is a possibility and danger of our hindering rather than helping men in the attainment of a real sincere, intelligent, personal faith by telling them what they are to believe. Faiths that have been formulated for men and put in their mouths to say may or may not represent their real personal faith. I have an abiding conviction that the open-minded

teachable disciple of the great Teacher who will journey with the human Jesus day by day in the narratives of Matthew or Luke will come to his Cæsarea Philippi in due time, and find himself ready to use words in describing his faith in Christ which he could not conscientiously have used at the beginning of what in all truth may be called his Christian life. The day a man begins to fellowship with Christ and to follow him he is a Christian in some true sense, no matter what he thinks of the Deity of the Son of Mary. It will not be long before he finds himself reading more and more, and with increasing satisfaction, the Gospel of John that identifies this companionable, lovable Son of Man with one who in the beginning was with God, and was God, and who later in the fulness of time became flesh and dwelt with men.

Let Churches erect and enforce what standards they may and will as conditions of Church membership—that is a matter which they have a right to determine for themselves—but in the matter of welcoming one into the fold of the true followers of Christ, let us be slow to demand that a “Cæsarea Philippi confession of faith,” shall come at the very beginning of his fellowship with him who called himself the Son of Man. Our Lord knew that his disciples in due time would call him the Son of God.

## *2. The Failure of the Sceptical Hypothesis to Account for the Christ of Christianity*

Perhaps the most serious attack ever made upon the Christian religion was that which undertook, in the middle of the last century, to prove that the evangelical records were un-historical and untrustworthy. It was claimed that the four Gospels were not written until the second century was far advanced, and that they therefore do not represent trustworthy history, but only a collection of traditions, legends, and myths with varying degrees of historic truth concerning Jesus. The names of David Strauss and Ernest Renan are especially associated with these attacks upon the documents which profess to give a trustworthy record of the leading events in the life of Christ. It is freely admitted by these

writers and their followers that some such person as Jesus of Nazareth lived in Palestine at about the time indicated, and that he was a remarkable person, who, by his purity of life, his lofty conception of God as a Father, his rare gifts as a teacher, and his untimely and unjust death, deeply impressed the simple peasant people among whom he lived. So remarkable and influential was he in what he said and did and suffered that his life and death made a profound impression upon the people. The events and facts of his life were not then and there put to record, but they continued to be talked about long after his death. As each one talked about him, the tendency, all but universal in human nature, to magnify and make events just a little more marvellous than they really were manifested itself in an ever-increasing degree in the stories told of his doings. Such love and devotion as the followers of Christ had for their Master became creative. They had "visions," and by virtue of their faith saw things—saw that which was not as though it were. Thus it was that miracles began to be attributed to him. These stories had been magnified and multiplied before a record was made. By this time it was a "tradition," not trustworthy facts, that could alone be recorded.

In legendary literature there is an original nucleus of historic truth in the narrative, but as the ball of tradition is rolled on down it keeps gathering stories more and more marvellous as to what the hero did, and presently it becomes impossible to distinguish the original nucleus of truth from the marvellous, and in this case miraculous, accretions that have gathered about it. Of only one thing men of the type of Renan and Strauss are confident—that everything attributed to Christ that was of the nature of a miracle was due to tradition. The Gospels therefore are nothing more than the beautiful legends and myths of the Christ. For our present purpose, there is no need that we point out the differences that exist between the legendary and mythical hypotheses. They are one in affirming the unhistoric character of the Gospel records and in denying the fact of miracles. After tradition had had time to make a hero of Christ by having

accumulated marvellous stories concerning his miracles, then it was that they enthroned him as the Messiah; and the writers proceed to *make a fit*: "This was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying," etc.

Now it is sufficient to say in reply to the legendary theory that it is not difficult in literature of the type found in the New Testament to distinguish trustworthy history from legends. The four Gospels, even admitting the possibility of incidents of a legendary character getting into the narrative, bear as a whole the marks of trustworthy history. We may confidently say that if the four Gospels are to be classed as legendary and untrustworthy records then we have no trustworthy history whatever in any ancient literature. Moreover it would be a strange anomaly if a "legend" should be the most influential writing in the literature of the world—the most influential intellectually and ethically as well as religiously. And if the "mythical theory" were true, the Jews are the very people, it would seem, who ought to have welcomed and accepted one who answered to their myth of a coming Messiah, whereas it was the Jews who rejected him and the Gentiles who have received him as their Messiah.

And, then, there are the sayings and sermons of him who spake as never man spoke before or since. If faith and love and imagination can become visionary and create miracles in the physical world, can they do the same in the intellectual realm? Did the unlettered fisherman of Galilee invent the sermon on the mount and put it into the mouth of the Son of Man?

But more effective still is that answer to these wild hypotheses which is based on the fact that practically all critics admit the genuineness and early date (before 68 A.D.,) of four of St. Paul's Epistles (Romans, First and Second Corinthians and Galatians) and these either affirm or imply such a prevalent and widespread belief in a divine and miracle-working Christ as is set forth in the four Gospels. Certain it is that Paul believed in a divine Christ. But this fact has in turn led to a third "hypothesis." Bauer, another German critic, not satisfied with the mythical and legendary hy-

potheses, invented another to get rid of the divine Christ: Christ did not himself claim to be divine, but Paul interpreted him in terms of Deity, and this interpretation, although it was a misinterpretation and therefore a stupendous untruth, not only gained credence but ultimately dominated the faith of the Church. Christianity should, then, be called Paulinism, seeing that it was created by Paul's interpretation of the human Jesus in terms of Deity. And this hypothesis, if it were true, would create a new problem, viz.:—How can it be that a religion which insists upon truth and honesty in all its followers is itself founded upon a lie? And what a bill of indictment against the human race, that the institution which more than any other influences the race for good is itself founded upon a gigantic misinterpretation and falsehood!

Of all hypotheses none is so rational as that based on the acceptance of the Gospel records as true—as possessed of historical trustworthiness, such trustworthiness as we demand of any and all source-books of history. Nor need we claim for it immunity from mistakes and from criticism by virtue of its inspiration. On the contrary, we rather invite the closest scrutiny of its statements, subjecting them to every fair and reasonable test for historic trustworthiness, and being ready to throw out of the record any individual statement that may fail to meet the critical test of truth. Only in this way can we furnish the proper ground for confidence in the Scripture records.

The holiest and divinest thing in all the Bible is its Christ. His presence there is its supreme credential—a truth we need continually to recognise and repeat. No criticism can shake the Church's confidence in the trustworthiness of those books that enshrine his divine-human personality in flesh and blood, the books in which he ever lives and breathes, and from which he comes by faith into the hearts of all who devoutly read and study its teachings.

### *3. The Influence of Christ on the Life of the World*

Christ said to the men of his generation that after the days of his flesh were ended, he was going to do greater things

than he was then doing, and he has richly redeemed his promise. Our Christ therefore ought to be, and is to us, a greater and diviner Christ than the early disciples knew, or could know, because we have seen his marvellous doings for more than eighteen centuries that have elapsed since they lived and died. Surely we ought to reinterpret Christ in our day because we can see more of God in him and in his work than they could see who lived with him in the days of his flesh. That the Christ of the twentieth century has been proven by his nineteen centuries of achievement in the world to be a greater and diviner Christ than the early disciples knew, is witnessed by every page of every history of the Christian Church and of civilisation that has been written in the last five hundred years, if it has been faithful to the facts of history.

The purpose of all reinterpretations of Christ by those who have caught the vision of his greatness is to awaken their fellowmen to a fresh and equally profound conviction that he is the very revelation of the love and power of God for the salvation of the world. As Christ was the incarnation of God so are men, his followers, to incarnate him. And as the incarnate Christ through revealing God in the words he spake concerning him as no words of prophet ever spoken before had revealed him, yet revealed and interpreted him more perfectly in his own life and character, so is it true of his followers that their truest and most effective interpretation and reproduction of the Christ is not in spoken words, but in living the Christian life and in exhibiting the Christian character. Men may doubt and deny your creed, but your life and your deeds are arguments that cannot be doubted or denied. This truth needs, again and again, to be impressed upon his followers.

How little Mount Sinai seems, said Heinrich Heine, when Moses is on top! And we may, with like thought, say: How little Mount Carmel seems when Elijah is on top! And how little the Mount of Transfiguration seems when Moses and Elijah are both on top! Yea, how little do Moses and Elijah and the Mount of Transfiguration all seem, when Christ, the matchless Man and the Lord of life, is up there on top! Per-

sonality is the thing that towers aloft above everything else in this world. "Men do not spell church with as big a C as they once did," some one has said, expressing his thought in a homely way, "nor preacher and priest with as big a P as they once did; but they spell manhood and Jesus Christ in larger letters than ever before in the history of the world." There is nothing in this world so good and great, and nothing so truly respected and reverenced, as a man who truly incarnates Jesus Christ in his own character and truly interprets him in his life.

"Christ has left the mark of his hand," says Dr. A. M. Fairbairn, "on every generation of civilised men that has lived since he lived, and it would not be science to find him everywhere and never ask what he was and what he did. Persons are the most potent factors of progress and change in history, and the greatest person known to it is the One who has been the most powerful factor of ordered progress. Who this is does not lie open to dispute. Jesus Christ is a name that represents the most wonderful story and the profoundest problem on the field of history—the one because the other. . . . He leads captive the civilised peoples; they accept his word as law, though they confess it a law higher than human nature likes to obey; they build him churches, they worship him, they praise him in songs, interpret him in philosophies and theologies; they deeply love, they madly hate for his sake. It was a new thing in the history of the world; for, though this humble life was written and stood vivid before the eye and imagination of men, nay, because it veritably did so stand, they honoured, loved, served, him as no ancient deity had been honoured, loved or served. . . . The belief in Christ has for now almost two thousand years lived under a criticism the most searching and scientific that ever assailed any idea of mind or fact of history, and yet this criticism has only made the belief more active, more vigorous, more sure of its intrinsic truth and reasonableness. . . . The wonderful thing in the story is that what in the abstract would have seemed impossible romance is in reality the most sober fact; while out of the story, when viewed in relation to the course

of human development, rises for philosophy the problem, Can he, so mean in life, so illustrious in history, stand where he does by chance? Can he who of all persons is the most necessary to the orderly and progressive course of history be but the fortuitous result of a chapter of accidents?" In other words, does not Christ's all-dominating influence in the civilisation of the world prove that he is more than a mere man?

The distinctions made by wealth and rank and family and nationality and creed that so often separate and alienate individuals from each other and divide men into warring classes and opposing parties blinded by religious or racial prejudice were barriers that did not for Christ have any existence. He constructed his whole scheme of social salvation on the assumption—on the certitude—that all men have hearts, that there is indeed but one heart in all humanity, and love is the way, the only way, to reach that heart. Reason is the rightful ruler of the world, but only when love rules reason is the reign of reason beneficent and unifying. The kingdom of God which Christ came to establish in the earth is set up first in the hearts of men, and because love is the all-dominating law of that kingdom, those who constitute its citizenship make one great brotherhood.

Even Buddha saw and said that "never in this world does hatred cease by hatred; hatred ceases only by love; that is always its nature." But it was the work of Christ to make love universal, to incarnate it, and practise it and inspire it in others. This he did by teaching that God is love, that his love knows no bounds except those which the good of the loved ones imposes. He taught that love must be extended to the lowest and least worthy. Love alone can overcome and disarm hate. An enemy who will meet force with force, and hate with hate to the very death, is disarmed and overcome when met by a love and spirit of forgiveness that are so sincere and genuine and generous that they leave nothing to hate and nothing to fight. And love that is inspired and directed by Christ does not end in and with emotion and feeling; but shows itself in service and extends this service whenever and wherever necessary to the point of sacrifice. When Christ

taught and himself exemplified the religion of love, of service and of sacrifice, he was revealing to us the heart of God. If any one demands proof that God is love, we need simply point to the words and works and character of the divine-human Christ, by whom, in whom and through whom God is revealed as Love incarnate.

O Love of God incarnate,  
 Who comest from above,  
 To show us God the Father  
 In human life of love,  
 God's love to earth thou bringest  
 That men may see in thee  
 How like man is the Father,  
 How like God man may be.

O Love of God incarnate,  
 Life bearer sent to men,  
 Who drinks at thy deep fountain  
 Shall never thirst again:  
 God's life to earth thou bringest,  
 And, though the thorn-path trod  
 Led thee to death on Calvary,  
 Thou wast the Son of God!

O Love of God incarnate,  
 Thy resurrection hour  
 Revealed the life eternal,  
 And robbed death of its power:  
 Enthroned on high thou reignest  
 That men may share with thee  
 Thy life, thy love, thy glory,  
 And live eternally.

O Love of God incarnate,  
 Thou everliving Word,  
 Through whom the Father speaketh,  
 In whom man's voice is heard,  
 In thee all love and wisdom,  
 Divine and human, meet;  
 When God through thee hath spoken,  
 Love's message is complete!

W. F. T.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN  
THROUGH THE CHURCH TO GOD



## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### THROUGH THE CHURCH TO GOD

#### I

#### A DIVINE-HUMAN INSTITUTION

Whenever one or more individuals come to know God in and through a personal experience, then and then only can the Church of God begin. Christian experience expresses its faith in Creeds, and its spirit of altruism in organisation for co-operative service. But statements of faith that have not a vital experience back of them are sure to be heresies of the heart if not of the head and ecclesiastical organisations that bring together and bind together men and women who are without a real religious experience and a real Christian motive are, whatever else they may or may not do, sure to fail to do the things for the accomplishment of which Christ established the Church on earth. Religious experience, therefore, is the thing of primary and abiding importance in the Church, and the essence of religious experience consists in knowing God. Of experience as a pathway to God—a path to which all other paths lead—we shall write in a later chapter.

#### *I. The Church Defined*

The Church may be defined in many different ways and from many different points of view. For our present purpose the Church may be most conveniently described as the collective body of those who know God, who know him by experience, and are living in fellowship with him. Those who have sought and found God cannot keep their knowledge to themselves. All men need to know God, and most men are in some sense seekers after God. If there be any who are ignorant of God and who are content to remain in their ignorance, they of all men are most in need of a knowledge of

God. The first and most important duty of those who know God is to impart that knowledge to others. It is the one great business of those who have found God to seek those who are lost, who have wandered away from their Father's house, and bring them back home, to their home and to their Father.

The Church is called the Church of God because God is its real spiritual and divine Head; and as such it existed in some sense from the beginning of man's religious history. In the old dispensation under the theocracy, it had no organisation distinct from the Hebrew nation. It is called the Church of Christ because it is composed of those who believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and as such it is a distinctly Christian organisation. It is called the Church of the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit, the third Person in the Trinity, is the Divine Agent who works in and through it, guiding it in the accomplishment of its divine mission. But while the three Persons of the Godhead—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—in the unity of the divine nature constitute the Head of the Church, those who know God constitute its body; and its one great purpose in the world is to bring men who do not know and obey God to a knowledge of Christ as their Saviour and of God as Their Father and into obedience to his revealed will.

In a passage of profound significance and of unequalled comprehensiveness the Apostle Paul describes the various elements that enter into and constitute the Church and how they all work together to accomplish the great spiritual end for which it was organised by its divine Founder:

“And he gave some *to be* apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness,

whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." (Eph. iv. 11-16.)

It is impossible to conceive of an organisation among men having a nobler purpose and end in view than that which is set forth in these words.

When a common and great work is to be done by a large number of individuals—a work widespread and far-reaching in its results upon a vast multitude of human beings—organisation becomes absolutely necessary. Organisation means leadership, government, and wisely directed co-operation on the part of all concerned for the accomplishment of a common end. It is not necessary that this organisation be the same everywhere and at all times so far as outward form is concerned. Oneness in mind and heart is the essential unity. The Church may be one in mind and heart, one in loyalty to a common divine Head, and one in purpose and effort to bring men to a knowledge of God, and yet at the same time be broken up into many subdivisions, each working in perfect harmony with all others to lead men to a saving knowledge of a common God and Father. If we have rightly defined the Church as those who know and obey God organised for the purpose of bringing an ignorant and lost world to a saving knowledge of God, then the Church should constitute the world's broadest and greatest highway leading men to God. Andrew and Philip are, for our present study of the Church, typical and ideal believers, in that having found their Lord they immediately went forth to lead others to him.

## 2. *The Church a Witness for God*

Unless there were individuals who had come to know God by experience, we have said, there could be no Church of God, seeing that the Church is composed of those who, hav-

ing an experience of God, are organised for the purpose of bearing witness. There is no one word which is oftener used in the New Testament to describe the mission of a Christian and the Church, than that of bearing witness. "Ye are my witnesses," said our Lord more than once to his disciples. In thought if not in words, this chief function of one who knows God was recognised in the evangelical prophecy of Isaiah. And for this duty they were to be amply equipped:—"Ye shall receive the power of the Holy Ghost coming upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me unto the uttermost parts of the earth." And as the apostles go forth we find them saying:—"We are his witnesses of these things." The English word "witness" is derived from an old Anglo-Saxon root (*witan*, to know), from which comes the word "wit," which in its original sense is "knowledge," as indicated in the expression, "to wit." Witnessing is therefore telling what one knows. A man may know what he does not tell, but he cannot tell what he does not know, though he may attempt to do so. A witness for God is one that knows God and simply tells what he knows. It requires no elaborate preparation, no high degree of education and culture, no special gift of eloquence, to render this service for God to one's fellowmen. Any one who knows his Heavenly Father and knows Christ as a personal Saviour and has the witness of the Holy Spirit within him that he is a child of God, and out of a full heart tells what he thinks and feels and knows—he is a witness for God even though he speaks with a stammering tongue. To render this service for his Lord is at once the privilege and the duty of every child of God. Of course the more he knows of God, the more he will have to tell about God.

And he who is most worthily and effectively to bear witness for his Lord must have not simply a head-knowledge of God, but a heart-knowledge of him also. There is, as we have previously noted, a knowledge that comes by study and through the intellect simply, and there is another and higher kind of knowledge that comes by personal experience. God's best witness bearers are they who have received training in both schools, that of the mind and that of the heart, who have both

an intellectual and experimental knowledge of his holy character and attributes, and of all those distinctive truths and facts of religion which are peculiarly open to this double method of attaining knowledge. The hope of a lost world for finding God is largely dependent upon the fidelity of the Church to its divine mission as a witness bearer.

### 3. *The Church Within the Church*

It is quite common in our day to hear men speak critically and depreciatingly of the Church, as if it turned men away from God, as if its influence were to repel men from God rather than lead men to God, as if its teachings were a caricature of God rather than a true expression of the Divine mind and will. Is this criticism warranted by the facts? We think not—certainly not if the Church be rightly defined and rightly judged. We must distinguish between the visible, outward organisation that has in it some, and, it may be, many, who know not God and have not the spirit of Christ, and the true spiritual but less visible Church—the Church within the Church. Whosoever and wheresoever worldly-minded men and women who know not God are found in the Church, and are allowed to dominate, there may be just ground for criticising the outward, visible organisation that we call the Church. But these are not the true Church. The true Church, we must continually insist, is nothing more nor less than those who, no matter what particular organisation they belong to, know and obey God and are doing all they can to lead others to a knowledge of him and into conformity to his will.

But while it is an inner subjective spiritual experience, a personal and experimental knowledge of God, that makes one a member of the spiritual and invisible Church of God, it is also true that wherever this vital relationship between God and an individual exists it will manifest itself outwardly in character and conduct. So that it is the life one lives that is to others the best evidence and proof that he is a member of God's invisible and spiritual Church. The best evidence for Christianity is a Christian. The best proof of the divine

character of the Christian religion and of the divine claims of the Founder of the Christian Church is not the "evidences of Christianity" presented in argumentative and logical form, but to produce Christians who in life and character truly represent the experience, the teachings and the ideals of Christianity.

The noble men and women whom the Church of God has produced, the "living Epistles," furnish the final and most irresistible of all the arguments that lead men to have faith in God. After all necessary allowances and discounts have been made for the fact that the Church has now and has always had within its membership hypocrites, fanatics, warring factions, and self-seeking and immoral persons, the fact yet remains that it is the greatest organisation of good and great souls working for good and noble ends to benefit and bless mankind that the world has ever seen. If it be imperfect, it is yet an organisation that has in it a large proportion of the best men and women in the world to-day, and these attribute whatever is good in their life and character in large part to the helpful influence of the Church upon them. It is the greatest of all forces working against immorality and unrighteousness; and no species of unrighteousness does it condemn more severely than hypocrisy in its own members, who, while professing to know and obey God, show by their spirit and lives that they know him not and obey him not. No one who is acquainted with the facts would challenge the statement that it is the greatest of all forces working for morality and righteousness, and its work is altruistic and unselfish in a sense and to an extent true of no other organisation in the world. The best of all arguments for Christianity is a true Christian.

The biography of the true saints—the men and women who have known and communed with God—is the best history of the true Church. To read that biography, to study that history, is to follow a pathway that leads most surely to God; for these saintly men and women owe their goodness and greatness most largely to the knowledge of God which they learned from and through the Church. The first and best way to lead men to God is to live a godly life and be in conduct and character

that which the Church sets forth as the Christian idea of manhood and womanhood. To point to God is good, but to point to God and lead the way is better; and leading the way is a matter of living as well as of speaking. Whittier, in writing about a most modest but lovely Christian character, has given beautiful poetic expression to the irresistible influence of a saintly life in leading others to God:

The dear Lord's best interpreters  
Are humble human souls;  
The gospel of a life like hers  
Is more than books or scrolls.

From scheme and creed the light goes out,  
The saintly fact survives:  
The blessed Master none can doubt  
Revealed in holy lives.

More and more the world in our day is applying the test of ethics to individuals and to Churches to determine the real moral value of what they profess to be and believe and do. The only type of Christianity that commands the respect of the world to-day is that which has ethical power to regulate the moral conduct, to develop moral character, to make men be and do that which is right in all the relations of life. We need to declare afresh at this time not only that the Church exists for the purpose of saving sinners and evangelising the world, but also that saving men and the world means getting men ready to live right as well as ready to die well, means getting men not only to join the Church, attend upon its ordinances, and support its institutions, but also to lead virtuous lives, to respect the rights of others, to make money honestly and spend it wisely, to discharge faithfully the duties which they owe as husbands, parents, neighbours, men of business, citizens, rulers. This is at once the supreme work and the crowning glory of the Christian religion. The religion that can make men live thus is the religion that is preparing them in the best possible way for that future and eternal life whose happiness depends upon the deeds done in the body. The Christian character is the crown and glory of the Christian religion.

*4. The Enlarging Social Mission of the Church*

Important and vital as individual experience is in making the Church a spiritual body, the Church is not individualistic but social in its nature and mission. In the reinterpretation of Christianity which is taking place in our day there is manifest a continually increasing emphasis upon the social nature and mission of the Church. Men as a rule move most easily in groups, alike to God and away from God. Attention has already been called to the fact that transformations that have taken place in men's ideas and ideals of human governors and governments as related to free peoples who constitute the governed has shown itself more or less in a reinterpretation of God. God was formerly thought of as not only clothed with the august attributes of divine Sovereignty and as exercising all the powers of a monarchical Ruler, high above, and far removed from, the people, a transcendent Being feared and held in awe. But now the Divine Being is interpreted more and more in terms of immanence as a Ruler in the midst of his people whose government of them is based on the recognition of their rational and moral freedom.

This does not mean any change in God; it only means a change in men's ways of thinking of God. This reinterpretation of God in terms of a divine democracy has resulted in a reinterpretation both of sin and of the Church with a new emphasis upon their social significance. In establishing the kingdom of God and his righteousness in the earth, we have to contend with and against not individual sins and sinners only, but against organised wrong that seeks to rob men of their rights—it may take the form of despotic civil government, or of militarism, or of landlordism, or of capitalistic, predatory industry that exploits and preys upon the poor and upon helpless women and children. When inherited traditions and social customs and environment are lenient towards or sympathetic with any particular forms of social evil, sins that would be and ought to be shamefaced become brazen faced and bold. The reason why many sins in individuals and communities are so hard to fight and suppress is because their

social reinforcement is so powerful. An ethicised society and ethicised public sentiment can alone make a social sin—a sin against one's fellow men—to be regarded as the hideous thing it is. And here, too, there may be sins of omission as well as commission. Sin is selfishness; and selfishness may take the form of idleness, which means living at the expense of other people. Parasitism is sin, said Henry Drummond, and all parasites, those who can work and should work and will not work, "are on the way to perdition, physically, intellectually and morally." God who is himself the ceaseless worker, who is the servant of all his creatures, has no place in his kingdom for drones and parasites. It thus appears that a reinterpretation of God in terms of democracy leads to a reinterpretation of the Church with a new emphasis upon its social nature and a larger insistence upon its social mission.<sup>1</sup>

## II

### THE PROBLEM OF CHURCH UNITY

Christ founded the Christian Church. Men have founded Churches. Luther, Zinzendorf, John Wesley, Alexander Campbell and others are called "founders" of Churches; and these several Churches are all at work in the world on a larger or a smaller scale. Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, Protestant Catholic, all have their subdivisions, and each of these divisions claims to be, if not the one and only true Church, at least the truest Church, the nearest approximation to the one original Church founded by Christ.

#### *i. The Significance of a Divided Church*

No one can think seriously of the Church's great and common task of bringing the unbelieving world to a knowledge of God without considering the relation of that task and its successful accomplishment to the many divisions that now exist within the Church and their relation to each other. That

<sup>1</sup> See Walter Rauschenbusch's "Theology of the Social Gospel" and companion volumes for further elucidation of these ideas. Also "The Social Creed of the Churches" by Harry F. Ward.

there is a profound need for some kind of an organisation which shall bring together and bind together all the followers of Christ throughout the world in a closer unity than any which now exists, a unity which shall be not simply ideal and spiritual, but real, practical and in some manner visible, is a conviction that is finding stronger and more frequent expression every day among thoughtful Christian people. This conviction, moreover, is intensified by an opinion, which many have long entertained, that sectarian denominationalism, religious bigotry, polemical controversy and whatsoever else causes sects and churches calling themselves Christian to wage war against each other,—such wars as early, mediæval and modern Church history bears painful witness to—have been in the past, and still are so far as they now exist, serious hindrances to the influence of the Church in bringing the world that lieth in wickedness to a true and saving knowledge of God. A religion which teaches that real and true Christians will and must love not only their friends but even their foes, can make but a feeble appeal to men unless its followers practise what they preach—and how can a man love his foes unless he first loves those of his own household? The voices of a divided, a much divided Church, reaching the ears of sinners in inharmonious and more or less contradictory notes,—one saying, lo, here is the essence of salvation, and another saying, lo, there—can never be heard and heeded as would the clear, calm, unified voice of a Church that could speak as the one Church of a common Lord and Master.

Changing our figure of speech and looking upon the religious denominations as allies, we may say that allies need not hope to conquer a common enemy if they are continually dividing and weakening their forces, and not infrequently are found turning the weapons of their warfare on each other. If the allies in any war of nations were to undertake to wage their war with as much lack of alignment; with such independence of each other and such disagreements and rivalries; with such insistence upon the rights of each and every division to undertake the same work in the same field; with such lack of unity in organisation and method; with such criticism of

each other, as have marked in varying degrees the relations of the Christian Churches and denominations and sects toward each other—Roman Catholics, Greek Catholics, and Protestants with their multitudinous sectarian divisions—if such utter lack of unity characterised an army, I say—defeat would be inevitable, or victory at least would be long delayed.

These three great divisions of the Christian Church—the Greek Catholic, the Roman Catholic and the Protestant Catholic—all have their weak spots and vulnerable points and come in, though not equally, for just criticism, in that each is responsible for imposing impediments and obstacles to that catholicity and unity which ought to characterise the followers of Christ for whose oneness with him and with each other Christ's high-priestly prayer recorded in the seventeenth chapter of John's Gospel was offered. The most conspicuous and culpable of these causes for criticism are pointed out clearly by Dr. O. E. Brown in the following words which, we are persuaded, apply to the Church in other parts of the world no less than to the Church in America:—

“The identification of Christian faith with a dead, formal, traditional orthodoxy, as is done in the Orthodox Greek Church, has proven no small embarrassment to the Christian cause in many sections of the world. This travesty on faith as a vital force probably reached its height in the State Church of Russia. There even dissent was based on resentment at a modification of the phrasing of the Ancient Creed in the interest of historical accuracy and Christian enlightenment. The Christian faith that speaks in terms of the present living Christ is a dire necessity for those who seek to keep the Christ dead and buried in ancient dogmatic decrees and outgrown forms.

“Then again, the identification of the Christian faith with submission to the word and control of the Pope of Rome as infallible in teaching authority and divine in jurisdiction, is also, as we are forced to see it, a challenge for the recovery of vital Christianity rather than an expression of the Christianity of faith. The rude shutting of the door of direct access to Christ by the harsh hand of papal autocracy, the assumption that blocks the way of millions from seeing with their own eyes the light of God in the face of the risen Christ, is the

supreme cruelty that to-day bears the label of Christianity. The personal faith that brings the bleeding heart of humanity into intimate and immediate touch with the life-giving heart of the sacrificial Saviour is Rome's supreme need. One vital task, therefore, in the great work of the Christianisation of faith in our country is to see to it that the millions of those who regard faith as submission to the vicar of God in Rome shall come to know faith as participation in the life of the Son of God, whose province it is to make men free indeed.

"Quite in contrast with that interpretation of faith as passive submission to the Pope of Rome is that identification of faith with sectarian individualism which refuses to have any fellowship with those who do not subscribe to the precise form of doctrine, or the exact type of organisation, which bears the denominational trade-mark. The assumption that any single church system, either of doctrine or of discipline, can claim a monopoly of all the wealth of truth and power that are Christ's is to forget that the Christian faith is as varied and as large as life itself. It is likewise a failure to recognise that faith has in it a progressive quality, and that it is enriched and enlarged with the enrichment and enlargement of personal life. It is needful, therefore, to recognise that the leaders of any one time may so emphasise some one phase of Christianity as to minimise some very vital essentials which are to be found in Christ. We may well believe that the thorough Christianisation of our American Protestantism will bring into the American Church a spirit of fraternity and of co-operation, the passionate purpose to answer the prayer of Him who poured out His soul in the words, 'That they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us.'"<sup>1</sup>

There is a real and deeply felt need for a Church-wide movement looking towards what may not improperly be designated as denominational disarmament—and disarmament does not mean, either in a nation or in a church, disintegration and decomposition. For a group of nations to disarm would mean that they are going to regard and treat each other not as enemies but as friends and as allies in recognising the rights

<sup>1</sup> "The Christianization of American Life." The MacDonell Lectures for 1920.

and promoting the interests of all alike—a brotherhood engaged in a common cause, the good of all. Not until the Christian Churches can and shall treat each other that way, in the interests of the common Kingdom of God and the common good of mankind, can it be expected that the nations of the earth will do so on any large scale.

The modern world is growing more and more impatient with the sectarianism which encourages separateness and thrives upon selfishness and seclusiveness, and emphasises and magnifies its differences from other sects as its possession of greatest importance. Money without limit and ministers without number are being wasted in maintaining multitudinous small and feeble churches just to keep up denominational organisation, whereas modern-minded laymen in all the Churches have ceased to be interested in the sectarian differences between the churches which once seemed so important. Christian people everywhere are now becoming interested more in the unities and agreements of their faith with that of other Christians than with their differences, and are responding heartily to movements looking towards greater co-operation in every kind of service which is common to all the churches. This is a healthful and hopeful sign.

## *2. The Good and the Evil of Religious Denominationalism*

In so far as the religious denominations have represented and promoted religious freedom in the Churches and have served as a protest against enforced uniformity in creed and worship, and have stood for the right of Christian people individually and collectively to interpret the Bible for themselves, they are wholly good. The contributions of some of these religious "sects" so called, these "denominations," as we designate the various branches into which the Christian Church is divided, are among the richest traditions and treasures of the modern Church. Instead of destroying the Church, they have saved it—saved it from a uniformity which, as enforced by ecclesiastical authority, might have proved its ruin. That these various sects and different denominations should have come into existence and have been developed and found such

self-expression as they have during the past two or three centuries, is the best possible proof of the existence of a liberty and a courage of conviction in matters of faith and worship and fellowship, which is far more healthful and desirable and promotive of progress than could have been any organic oneness of the Church which should have been secured at the expense of liberty in these matters.

No effort to bring about greater Church unity and a more effective organisation of the Christian forces can possibly succeed that should seek to rob any believers or any churches of their present liberty in matters of faith and worship and fellowship. "Unity in essentials, liberty in non-essentials and charity in all things"—this has long been and must remain the motto of the Church universal.

But that sectarianism and denominationalism have been carried to a hurtful excess and have now become in many respects detrimental to the best progress and advancement of the Kingdom of God is a conviction that is becoming more and more prevalent among thoughtful Christian people throughout the world.

### *3. Christian Unity a Prerequisite of Church Unity*

Are we to seek Christian unity through Church unity, or Church unity through Christian unity? Are we to get Christian people to love each other by first putting them in the same Church? or are we rather to bring them into one Church by getting them first to love each other? Surely the latter is not only the "line of least resistance," but the only line that leads to the desired unity. And if it be true that "by this shall all men know that we are Christ's disciples, if we have love one to another," why shall it be thought a thing incredible and impossible that these disciples should all be found willing to come together in the work of their common Lord?

But while Church unity is desirable, it can only come about as a result of Christian unity. There can be unity of heart without unity of head. The thoughts of men, even of men equally Christian in spirit, differ as do the leaves upon the tree, but their hearts may be one in brotherly love, as the sap in the

body of the tree is one. If we seek to bring about the unity of the Christian Church by securing outward and organic union first, and by insisting on uniformity in confession of faith and in forms of worship, we can never gain it. But there ought to be no insuperable obstacle in the way of bringing together in harmonious unity in one great world-wide Christian Church all who accept Jesus Christ as their Divine-human Lord and Master, and who, being permitted to worship him in whatsoever manner is most acceptable to them, are willing and anxious to co-operate with all other like-minded disciples of Christ in establishing and extending the Kingdom of Christ in the hearts of men and throughout all the nations of the earth.

Church unity can never be brought about by any one religious sect refuting successfully the errors of all other sects and drawing the whole Christian world into itself. Church bigotry and denominational pride may cherish that fond dream, but it is a vain vision that will never be realised. It must be "peace without victory" for any one sect in so far as it is opposed to and different from other sects. Providence is never going to give to any one religious denomination the honour and glory of having all others surrender and capitulate and seek admission to its membership. Into the one common and blessed Church of our Lord Jesus Christ we all hope some day to find ourselves one—one in mind and heart, and one, it may be, in name—many members in one body, and all members one of another, one in Christ. The day of peace and unity is coming some day; but it is going to be the result of universal "denominational disarmament," a triumph of brotherly love, marked by the sacrifice and surrender of things long counted important, and it may be vital, but which were found to be so far capable of modification as to be merged without the sacrifice of anything vital into that unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God that will make the whole world one in him. There are some rights which we have no right to surrender, and there are other rights which we not only have a right to surrender but which, being magnanimously and courageously surrendered, pave the pathway

to peace and to power, to moral victory in genuine Christian unity. "He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it," is a saying of Christ which expresses a profound truth not only for individuals but for collective bodies of Christian believers.

#### 4. *The Primary Credential of a True Church*

If some men have natures that respond peculiarly and feelingly to a call to God that comes in and through a stately and majestic ritual, it is fortunate that there is a Church that provides just what appeals to their natures. If others are so constituted that they can approach God best in the simple manner of the Quaker or the Puritan, why should they not be permitted to do so? And surely it is well that the great, widespread Church of God should provide for their needs, and, indeed, for the needs of all devout and reverent natures and all religious temperaments. That there should be different denominations within the Church of God, giving prominence and emphasis to different doctrines and different features and elements of worship that appeal to different natures, is not to be wondered at or objected to. But why should different bodies of Christians ever have gone to war with each other over these matters? Why should people not be allowed to journey toward God in whatsoever manner is to them most helpful and inviting? In nonessentials there should be allowed the utmost liberty; in essentials only should there be an insistence upon unity.

The essential thing is that the Church shall lead men to God and not away from him, and shall impart a true and saving knowledge of him and his will. So long as a Church by its use of art and music and ritual and ceremonies and formulated creeds and other adjuncts and agencies can appeal to the fact that it is by means of these instrumentalities leading men to God and imparting to them a true and saving knowledge of him, it stands vindicated in its polity and mode of worship. Surely there can be no fairer and more righteous standard by which to judge a Church than this: Has it throughout its history been leading men to God, and is it now effectively leading men to God and imparting a true knowledge of him?

or has it, on the contrary, been diverting men from God and obscuring the vision of him and misinterpreting his nature and will to men? The Church uses music and art and architecture and rituals and ceremonies and creeds. The question is, Are these things, as used by the Church, leading men to God and imparting a true and saving knowledge of him, or are they hiding God and diverting men from a saving knowledge of him? That is the true and righteous test by which to judge of each Church and each feature of the Church. Whatever diverts a Church from its first and greatest duty—that of effectively leading lost men to God—must be condemned. Do the pictures and graven images sometimes found in churches, for example, and the elaborate and artistic music, and the impressive, spectacular ceremonies conducted by a gaudily gowned clergy, and the recital of rituals, and the use of venerable creeds—do these things lead men to God and teach men truly and effectively the nature and will of God? If so, they are as they should be; if not, they should be discarded or modified or substituted by that which will more effectively help the Church to accomplish its one great purpose in the world—viz., to lead men to God, to teach them who and what God is, and to bring them into right living relations with God.

In trying, then, to find out which is *the* Church—the one Church that is truest and divinest—we cannot do better than apply the test *Ubi Spiritus ibi ecclesia*—where the Spirit is, there the Church is; where the Holy Spirit's presence is most manifest in leading men to God and imparting to men a true knowledge of his nature and will, in the conversion of sinners and the edification of believers—*there* the true Church is to be found. And they who compose the true Church will have the spirit of Christ and be ready to co-operate, as opportunity may offer and wisdom may dictate, with all others whose one great purpose in the world is to bring sinners to God.

##### 5. *The True Goal of Christian Catholicity*

We must therefore conclude that while Christian unity is a goal devoutly to be desired, it is something that must come first and show itself first in the spirit of brotherly love and

co-operation in Christian service; and not until this inner unity marks the intercourse of Christians with Christians, and of the different branches of the Christian Church with each other, is organic union possible or desirable. Religious denominations have sprung up and multiplied and flourished in this New World as in no other country in the world in all history. We may count ourselves happy if Divine Providence shall so overrule our multitudinous divisions and our agreements in disagreeing as to bring about a brotherly love that will show itself in a desire on the part of all to so relate themselves to the one body of Christ that all will be members one of another and co-workers one with another. While American Christianity may have been weakened by needless divisions, it has been happily free from one notable evil accompaniment of unity that has marred the history of the past, namely, the effort of unified ecclesiastical authority and autocracy to enforce a uniformity in matters of faith and modes of worship which is incompatible with that perfect religious liberty which belongs to the sons of God whose knowledge of the truth has made them free. The unity that results from a spirit of catholicity and brotherly love, and the desire to co-operate in helpful service with all who seek to know and do the will of God, is the highest and best expression of true Christian liberty. This is the goal of American Christianity, brotherly love and co-operation first; then and thereafter organic union as may seem wise. In the meantime, while that larger and better unity which is to be desired is delayed in its coming, it is pleasing to know that in no other country in the world so truly as here in America have the different branches of the Protestant Christian Church worked together so harmoniously and so effectively, in friendly rivalry to impart a knowledge of God and to advance the kingdom of God both at home and throughout the world.

Whenever and wherever Church divisions are marked by wrangling dissensions, it is in vain that we try to lead men "through the Church to God." The Christian Church will effectively accomplish its high and holy mission of leading men to God only in proportion as individual Christians, and

those groups of Christians that we call Churches, exemplify in their relations to and with each other the words of Him who said, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, when ye love one another." When love makes God's children one, and the Churches of Christ one, then and then only, will they be one indeed. Nothing can win men to faith in God and fellowship with his children more effectively than the sight of brethren dwelling and working together in unity; and nothing can drive men away from God more effectively than for professing Christians to manifest jealousy, enmity and hate, and engage in wrangling disputes and angry dissensions. Within limits differences of opinion are legitimate and even healthful and promotive of activity and progress; but these limits must all be kept within the bounds of brotherly love.

In the meantime it is most fitting that all men everywhere should lift up holy hands and pray for Christian unity, and for themselves resolve that for the future they will minify their differences and magnify their unities. When ecclesiastical bigotry and hate come to be recognised and treated as the most hurtful of all heresies, and the spirit of brotherly love comes to be recognised as the best token and test and badge of orthodoxy, then will churchmen be Christians indeed, and Christ's "high-priestly prayer" for the unity of his followers will be answered.

"He drew a circle that shut me out,  
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout;  
But love and I had the wit to win:  
We drew a circle and took him in."

In words like these Edwin Markham has given beautiful utterance to a great truth. We have all been too long engaged in drawing circles which shut our Christian brothers out. It behooves the followers of Christ now, one and all, to enter into a new partnership with Love, and learn how to draw a circle big enough to take their brothers in. This is the only "wit" that can ever win the world. Thus and thus alone will come true Christian catholicity, that catholicity which can alone make the visible Church one, in a unity so winning that it will woo men to God.

## III

THE CHURCH'S AGENCIES FOR LEADING MEN  
TO GOD

Among the different agencies employed by the Church for the accomplishment of its work, some have a more direct reference than others to leading men to God and imparting a saving knowledge of his nature and will. Such, for instance, are the Sunday school, the preaching of the Word, the publication of Christian literature, and the establishment and maintenance of Christian institutions of learning. These are all in the highest and best sense evangelistic in their purpose. Before all these and back of all these is the Christian home, which is not so much an agency of the Church, as it is one of those universal agencies belonging to God's larger and wider providential government of the world.

*i. The Christian Ministry*

The foremost instrumentality of the Church which has been especially set apart to the task of leading men to God and imparting a knowledge of him is the pulpit and the preaching of the gospel by ministers divinely called to their sacred vocation. What the prophet and the priest were in the old dispensation, this, and more than these both, the gospel minister is in the new dispensation. These interpreters and prophets of God are they who, more than any and all others, have kept alive in the world the sense of God and the knowledge of his will. The Christian pulpit is incomparably the greatest single agency at work in the world to-day for leading men to God. All forces whose tendencies are Godward meet in the Church and converge in the pulpit. It is the preacher's office to use all the arguments and bring to bear on men all the influences that he can command to lead them to God. He is God's chosen ambassador, sent forth to stand in the highway or upon the watchtower and point out to men the path that leads to him.

If we admit, as we may and must, that moral and spiritual

qualities take precedence over the intellectual and literary in qualifying men for effectively interpreting God to their fellow men, it does not follow from this that intellectual equipment is of secondary and trifling importance in preparing the minister for his work. On the contrary, it is of the highest importance. No better proof can be needed to establish the truth of this statement than to appeal to the fact that nearly every one of the illustrious prophets and preachers of righteousness, whose names find an honoured place in the history of the Church, obtained, in preparation for his holy calling, the very best education that was possible in the age and country in which he lived—and most of these men had special and extensive training in theological studies in addition to their general education, and their preparation fitted them for understanding and meeting the special needs of the day in which they lived. Is it a mere accident that an unusually careful and thorough training in youth should have been followed in these cases by unusual usefulness and eminence in later life? Or do the two facts sustain to each other, in some degree at least, the relation of cause and effect? Is it an accident that Moses and Paul, the two most influential characters in Old and New Testament history, should have been the most thoroughly educated young men of whom we have any account in the Bible? Is it an accident that Chrysostom, "the prince of preachers," even to this day counted by the historian as the greatest preacher who has ever appeared in the Christian Church, should have gone through all the schools accessible in his day? Is it to be accounted an accident that Martin Luther and John Wesley, the greatest religious leaders and most influential preachers in the history of the modern Christian Church, should have come from great universities, where they tarried longer and studied more extensively than their fellows? To ask these questions is to answer them. There can be no more important and sacred task given to mortal man than that of interpreting God to his fellow men; and if there is any one vocation that calls more than does any and all others for the best equipment, for knowledge the most extensive and accurate, for knowledge that

comes both from religious experience and from study, it is the Christian ministry.

In the artillery and navy the rule is that a gun shall be sixteen times as heavy as the projectile which it carries. In every human undertaking a man must be greater than his work in order to be equal to his work. Give a weakling a great intellectual and moral task to accomplish, and he will not put it over. Send forth a moral and intellectual weakling to deliver a great religious message, and he cannot do it. He goes into the pulpit and speaks like one who has to say something but not like one who has something to say. That is a great message that has been committed to him who has been commissioned to impart to men that knowledge of the true God which carries in itself the issues of life and death. An intellectual and ethical weakling cannot supply the moral and spiritual power necessary to make it accomplish its mission of salvation. To be prepared for this great mission to which God calls not a few men merely but all of those who know him and have found fellowship in the Church, the first and most important qualification is to know God, to know him as he has been revealed in and through Jesus Christ, and so to impart that knowledge to others that they also shall know him and love him and serve him.

## *2. The Christian School*

The history of education reveals the fact that in this sphere the Church has always been the pioneer. Although now civil governments in all civilised countries provide for the education of the young, for a long time this work was begun, promoted and conducted chiefly by the Church. Christian institutions of learning, established and conducted by the Church, have their chief reason of being in the fact that they can greatly aid the Church in its one great purpose and mission in the world, that of imparting a true and saving knowledge of God to men. But what makes education Christian is not the fact that a school is owned and controlled by a religious denomination. Whenever and wherever the aims and ends and atmospheres of a school are permeated and

dominated by Christian ideas and ideals, there is Christian education, no matter who owns and controls the school.

The Church's interest and participation in education, manifested in founding and conducting institutions of learning, is based on the assumption that religion has an important and indispensable place in the education of the young, and a proper knowledge of God is at the very heart of religion and at the foundation of all true education. God is the first and greatest object of all knowledge. Education may be carried on without any aid from religion and without any recognition of God; but a godless education cannot develop moral character in the educated, and the object of all education is to secure not intellectual development merely, but, even more, a lofty type of moral character in the educated man. By means of her institutions of learning the Church is enabled not merely to give due recognition to God and due emphasis to the value of the moral ideal in education, but to attract and guide and command the attention of educated and thinking men, and thus influence and more effectively than would otherwise be possible the highest and best thought of the world. The aim of Christian nurture is always Christian character.

Teaching, rightly defined, is just as important a part of the work of the Christian church and ministry as is preaching. That is poor preaching which does not partake of the nature of true Christian teaching and which fails to educate morally and religiously; and that education is certainly not entitled to be called Christian which fails to make its chief and ultimate aim in the training of the mind, to be the building up of moral character, the making of cultured Christian manhood and womanhood—and this is the end of all preaching. It is well for us to remember that Jesus Christ, the first great preacher of the Christian religion, is oftener called a teacher than he is a preacher, and is oftener declared to have taught than he is to have preached. And that portion of his work which partakes of the nature of Christian teaching is much larger than that which can properly be designated as preaching in the sense in which we now use that term. It was by Christ's teaching, line upon line and precept upon precept, that men

learned the greatest and most precious truth he taught—the Fatherhood and love of God.

### 3. *The Sunday School*

In the Church's system of religious education the Sunday School fills a large and increasingly important place; and its work is so distinctly and emphatically religious that it calls for special consideration among the Church's educational agencies of highest value. As an agency and influence at work leading the young to a knowledge of God, it reaches its highest function. The influence of the Sunday School is seen at its best only when it is reinforced by parental religious instruction at home; but, whether so reinforced or not, it is perhaps the most powerful and far-reaching single agency now at work in Christian lands leading the young to God. A large and continually increasing proportion of those who are saved and brought into the Church are saved while they are young, between the ages of ten and twenty; and these young converts, it is found, have as a rule been trained in the Sunday School and come from it into the Church. But the Sunday School is not only the nursery of the Church whence it is now receiving most of its converts; it is in a large and true sense to be regarded as the entire Church at work studying the Bible and learning about God, his word and his will.

Since it has been found that the average age at which people are converted is about fourteen years, it follows that the turning point in the moral and religious life, the critical and strategic point for spiritual conquest, is not in the great congregation where the pastor is preaching to people who will average perhaps from thirty to forty years of age, but down there in the basement or over there in the annex, where the boys and girls are to be found with their teachers in the Sunday School, or gathered in their clubs and leagues. Conversions in mature life are growing relatively more and more rare and conversions in youth relatively more frequent. Statistics taken something over fifty years ago in one of the Churches showed that about sixty per cent of those entering the ministry were converted in revivals and forty per cent else-

where. Twenty-five years ago the per cent converted in revivals, as shown by these statistics, had dropped to twenty-nine; and five years ago these statistics showed it had dropped to twenty-five per cent. These are very significant figures. As the converts come now mostly from the Sunday School, he is the wise pastor who will magnify his opportunity to work here and who will make companions and co-workers of his Sunday School teachers in seeking to save, to instruct and to train for service the young people of the Church. There is no one phase of the pastor's work that will count for so much, that will make his moral and religious influences so far-reaching and lasting in a given pastorate, be it long or short, as study and time devoted to guiding and inspiring the teachers in his Sunday School, and to personal work for and with the young people of the church. No movement of the Christian Church in modern times is more significant and encouraging than the improvement that has been brought about in part, and is being still further brought about in the work and character of this great agency of the Church, than which none is more influential in leading the rising generation to a knowledge of God.

#### 4. *Christian Literature*

Consider again what a mighty agency in the hands of the Church and always available for leading men to God, is *Christian literature*. From the tiny tractate and the ephemeral periodical to the ponderous and learned octavo volumes there is found in the printed literature of the Church something suited to the intellectual and moral needs of every seeker after God. The time was when the Church relied mainly upon the spoken word and upon the proclamation of the gospel by word of mouth to lead men to God; but conditions have now so far changed that many are contending that Christian literature has come to represent a force and influence as great as or even greater than the pulpit in the world's evangelisation and education.

Happily these two great agencies of the Church are not in any way opposed to each other, but each needs and reinforces

the other. The Christian Church needs not only to have its printing presses busy publishing its distinctly Christian periodicals and books; but it needs to commandeer and control and mobilise as far as possible in the interests of Christian ethics and ideals all the great secular journals and great daily papers, which are perhaps the mightiest of all forces in guiding and governing the present-day world.

While all these agencies of the Church serve other purposes, they have no more important function to serve than that of helping the Church to accomplish its one supreme mission of leading men to God. These are the features and agencies of the Church which serve to make it the world's greatest pathway to God.

### 5. *The Need for Stirred Souls*

All these agencies need divinely stirred souls to make them effective as forces for the upbuilding of the kingdom of God. There is needed profoundly by cultured Christian people to-day a vision of the thrice-holy God whom Isaiah saw; and following this vision, a readiness to answer the appeal, "Who will go for us and tell men of the true God," by saying, as Isaiah said, "Here am I, send me." Had Isaiah, after getting that vision, refused to go and tell men of it, there would be no Isaiah in our Bible to-day. We have cultured souls and we have visions, but we are sadly in need of cultured souls stirred by the vision of God, and by a true vision of the sins and the spiritual needs of men—and this vision should be not only of the idolatries and sins of men beyond the sea, but of the awful idolatries and sins of the people here in our homeland. Here at the foot of our Mars Hills and in our cultured cities are sins and idolatries that should stir the souls and consciences of all cultured Christian men and women among us, and not until cultured Christian men and women are stirred to action with the passion of a Paul will these evils ever be brought to an end. Nothing is more needed by these multitudes who are bowing down before their altars "to the unknown God" than to give them a knowledge of the true God, of that Father in heaven whose offspring they are.

It is the stirred soul alone that can stir the souls of others. And how important it is that the souls of men shall be stirred by knowledge and not by ignorance, by truth and not by error, by faith and not by fanaticism; and how important also it is that this faith shall be faith not in error but in truth, and not in half-truths, but in the sane whole-truth as the truth is in Jesus. Men need not only to know God, but to know him aright—"whom to know aright is life eternal."



CHAPTER SEVENTEEN  
THROUGH THE CREEDS TO GOD



## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

# THROUGH THE CREEDS TO GOD

### I

#### THE VALUE OF CREEDS

When one considers how large a place the creeds have filled in the intellectual life of the Church in the past, it might seem an easy task to make an appraisal of them, and to rate them high among the moral and spiritual assets of the Church. And yet there are not a few Christians who doubt the real value of Church creeds, and they are free to declare that their reason for calling in question their value is found most of all in the past experience of the Church with her creeds, which, instead of securing unity of faith as they were meant to do, have proved to be ceaseless causes of doubt, discussion and division. It is worth while then to inquire how the Church came to have creeds, and what purpose they have served and may yet serve in the life of the Church. We are most concerned to know how they interpret God. Are the creeds of the Church helps or hindrances to faith in God? Do they reveal or conceal the real and true God? Do they clear the way or block the way for pilgrims who are seeking God?

##### *i. The Reason for Creeds*

Dr. Fairbairn begins his "Philosophy of the Christian Religion" by contrasting the simple and winning statements concerning God and Christ found in the Gospels with the hard and difficult metaphysical and theological statements found in the Church creeds. And yet this comparison, which is so unfavourable at first sight to the creeds, is followed by a strong defence of these efforts to interpret in theological terms and by rational analysis the simple but profound facts and truths of the Christian religion. If the Gospels were merely simple,

easy and beautiful statements of religious and moral truths which, by reading once or twice, men could so fully fathom and understand that they would not need or care to read them again, because they had gotten all that they contained, the Christian religion would have been short-lived. It is because the facts and doctrines of Christianity recorded in the Gospels, although simple and transparent and beautiful, are at the same time deep and profound enough to challenge the strongest powers of the human mind to understand and interpret them that they have power to grip the minds of men from age to age. The Church creeds represent, we may say, the response of mankind to this profound and perpetual challenge of the Christian religion to the minds of men to give its great truths rational interpretation and expression.

A creed should be a brief, clear, self-consistent and reasonably complete statement of all the essential and cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith with a special emphasis upon those truths that need most to be stressed in the day that calls it forth. In proportion as these qualities characterise a confession of faith, in that proportion will it be a useful and influential expression of the faith it represents, commanding the respect of all thoughtful and truth-seeking minds. Waters which might be powerless spread over wide acres become dynamos of power when confined in, and made to pass through, the narrow, rock-ribbed channels of Niagara. The truths of Christianity spread through ponderous volumes will not influence many; they need to be condensed and reduced to clear, brief statements to give them dynamic force and intellectual vigour.

## 2. *The Mutable and the Permanent Elements in the Christian Faith Distinguished*

If we have rightly defined the nature and functions of a Church creed, it follows that no one creed could possibly be written that would so fully express and represent the faith of the Church as to remain unchallenged and unchanged from age to age. Inasmuch as whatsoever is true in a creed is not discarded when the time comes for revision, or for writing

a new creed, but on the contrary its truths are reincorporated and perpetuated in the new, the mutability of a creed instead of being a thing to be deplored, becomes a condition of progress whereby truer and more adequate statements of faith are made possible from time to time.

They who seek to perpetuate old creeds in the Church by making it practically impossible for men to change them even when they would do so if they could—they who seek to make them binding and to invest them with sanctity and authority long after they have served their day and generation and have ceased to be a true and adequate expression of the new and larger faith of a new generation—they who do this are not the friends but the enemies of faith, and of Church creeds. And thus it is easy to see why the traditional Church creeds have come into disrepute, and why this has become a creed-criticising age; it is because these traditional creeds have been so deeply imbedded in Church "constitutions" as to make it exceedingly difficult if not impossible to have them replaced by new statements of faith. And they may be imbedded deeply in Christian "sentiment" as well as in Church rubrics. "You cannot reason out," said Thomas Carlyle, "what was never reasoned in." A thing may get into us by "recitation," as well as by "reason," may get in by "recitation" before it gets in by reason; get in by recitation and remain in, even though it never gets in at all by reason. Where is there a Christian individual among us to whom the Apostles' creed has not become at once familiar and endeared, by virtue of our reciting it over and over again from youth up?—and this regardless of whether we ratify and endorse every expression in it or not.

That creeds do not necessarily minister to sectarian narrowness and bigotry may be proved, at least negatively, by the fact that among the Christian sects that have an unenviable reputation for denominational narrowness and bigotry are some that reject and denounce all creeds, claiming that they are not only unnecessary but unscriptural—affirming that the New Testament alone is their only credal statement. On the other hand, they who have clear-cut, definite and well defined creeds in which they fully believe, may be broad-minded and

abounding in charity, catholicity and brotherly love towards those who differ from them. Unity in the faith may characterise those whose Church creeds and Church affiliations differ. Those who insist on absolute uniformity and immutability in creeds are hindering and not helping the coming of the true Christian unity.

## II

## THE HISTORIC CREEDS

In studying the great historic creeds of the Church with reference to their interpretation of God and their bearing on present-day faith, we shall select four as best suited to our purpose—the Apostles' Creed, the Athanasian Creed, the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England, of which the Twenty-five Articles of the Methodist Church are an abbreviation. These creeds are of authority and binding on believers so far as being in the canons and constitutions of the Churches can give them authority. If any reader should be disposed to say that in bringing these old creeds up for consideration, we will be reviving old and dead issues, that they are at best but loosely held and enter but lightly into the present-day thought and life of the Church, and that any attempt to show their inadequacy to meet existing religious needs will prove a useless and thankless task—if he speaks thus of them, it may be well to remind him that one of the most active of the present movements looking towards Church unity is based on the hope of securing on the part of all the followers of Christ a return to a universal acceptance of the earliest of these creeds, the Nicene and Athanasian as well as the Apostles'. This shows that if they be "dead," there are at least some who would have them resurrected and brought to life again. It is therefore altogether pertinent to institute an inquiry into these creeds to find out whether they be helps or hindrances to faith in God in our day. The paths to God are paths of progress, and it is very important that in seeking to conserve the truth of the past we do not mistake reversion for conservatism.

Of one of these creeds (the Apostles') it may be truly said that it not only continues to be recited by worshippers, but is more widely used perhaps than ever before. It is, therefore, pertinent to ask: does it continue to be used and to hold its high place in Christian worship because all of its statements express acceptably the faith of present-day Christians, or does it continue to be used by the Churches generally in spite of the fact that some of the phrases and statements contained in it are unacceptable to some worshippers, and are uttered by them with mental reservation or with a margin of meaning so wide that it permits of liberty of private interpretation? Has any one of these historic creeds confined itself strictly to a statement of the fundamental facts of faith, or have they one and all gone beyond the bounds of fundamental truths, even incorporating to a greater or less extent statements that do not express the faith of many who are called on to subscribe to them? There is perhaps no better way of trying to find out what Christians need to express their faith to-day than by examining these historic creeds which, however great their historic value, no longer meet present-day needs. We start our inquiry with that one which is supposed to come chronologically first, and which is certainly the most acceptable to the modern Church of all the ancient creeds, as indicated by its almost universal use in Christian worship.

### *1. The Apostles' Creed*

Of this creed Dr. McGiffert of Union Theological Seminary says that "to it perhaps more than to anything else—more even than to the Gospels, which were not widely read in the Middle Ages—we owe the fact that Jesus Christ is and always has been, the object of the Christian's faith, and that his figure has never been completely lost, even when the true Gospel has been most overlaid with scholastic philosophy or with sacramentarianism or ecclesiasticism."

There is no agreement among theologians and Church historians as to when or by whom this most familiar and influential of all the Church creeds was written. The earliest tradition is perhaps that stated by Rufinus, about 400 A.D., who

says: "There was an ancient tradition that the Apostles, being about to depart from Jerusalem, first settled a rule for their future preaching, lest, after they were separated from each other, they should expound different doctrines to those whom they invited to the Christian faith. Wherefore, being all assembled together and filled with the Holy Ghost, they composed this short rule of their preaching, each one contributing his sentence, and left it as a rule to be given to all believers." A writer bearing the name of Augustine goes further and pretends to tell us exactly what each Apostle's contribution to the creed was: Peter said, "I believe in God, the Father Almighty"; John, "Maker of heaven and earth"; James, "And in Jesus Christ his only son, our Lord"; Andrew, "Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary"; Philip, "Suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead and buried"; Thomas, "He descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead"; Bartholomew, "He ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty"; Matthew, "From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead"; James, the son of Alpheus, "I believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy Catholic Church"; Simon Zelotes, "The Communion of the saints, the forgiveness of sins"; Jude, the brother of James, "The resurrection of the body"; Matthias, "The life everlasting." And, being thus made, says Augustine, it was called the Apostles' Creed. It will be noted that the inspiration of each Apostle was not considered a divine preventive of his preaching a doctrine that might be in conflict with doctrines preached by his brother Apostles. It was thus, according to this tradition, to prevent variations and hurtful conflicts and to secure uniformity among the Apostles that this creed came to be written. In the absence of a unifying creed the Apostles might contradict each other. This tradition is here given merely as a matter of literary curiosity; there is not the slightest ground for attaching any historic value to it; but it serves to show how this, our earliest creed, has threaded its uncertain way to us through legends and myths.

"I believe in God." This, says Dr. G. A. Johnston Ross, was the first Christian emphasis.

"The outstanding note of primitive Christianity was a joyous trust in the Supreme Being. The whole effect of Christ's life and career had been that the faith and hope of the men who accepted him was set, in a new confidence, upon God. What we first need to know about God is his disposition and attitude towards us: is the Power behind and above the world friendly to us or is He not? The answer of the Apostles' Creed to this question is the one word, 'Father.' This word at once suggests that God is bound to us by ties that are unbreakable and which lay upon him certain obligations. It suggests that a man should find in God a certain element of the unalterable, a permanent ground for confidence. Unhappily the word "Father" may suggest to us anything from mere physical paternity to a relationship of the highest ethical and disciplinary value. In us, the idea of Fatherhood, unstable in equilibrium, is ever apt to degenerate into a thought of indulgent and ministrant kindness and even of a weak slavery to children's needs and caprices. But Christ's recorded words show us how careful he was to surround the thought of the divine Fatherhood by safeguards of reverence: 'I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth'; 'My Father'; 'O righteous Father'—such phrases abundantly attest his own thought of God and plainly indicate the attitude he would have us take to God."<sup>1</sup>

The large use that is made of this ancient creed throughout the Christian Church attests its popularity and its persistence. Familiarity with its phraseology, brought about by its frequent recital in public worship, has endeared it to all people, even to those who in sober judgment think that some statements in it might have been advantageously omitted—or at least could be advantageously omitted for our day. There are four clauses to which objection has long been made, namely, "Born of the Virgin Mary," "He descended into hell," "the holy

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter I in Dr. Ross's volume, titled "The God We Trust," for the full elucidation of this thought.

‘Catholic’ church,” and the “resurrection of the body.” The objection to the second and third of these is not so much to the fact stated as to the phraseology; the objection that has been raised by some to the first and fourth is to the facts stated.

As to the “descent into hell,” the objection is that the English word “hell” which was long a true rendering of the Hebrew “sheol” and of the Greek “hades,” meaning the place of departed spirits, regardless of whether they are good or bad, has long since, in popular usage, lost that meaning and has come to mean the place to which only the wicked go at death. This fact has led to the omission of the phrase from the creed as used in some Churches.

The word “catholic” means properly “pertaining to the whole Christian Church,” but the Church of Rome has appropriated this word to itself, claiming to be the one and only body of believers that can be truly designated as the Church of Christ. It is simply a question as to whether this ancient, appropriate and expressive word that belongs to the Church universal should be surrendered to the Church of Rome. Some who think the word belongs to the whole Church, yet feel that its identification with the Roman Catholic Church has become so widespread and common that it is best to substitute it with another word or phrase of identical meaning; and by some churches this has been done. But others, and these constitute the majority of Christian people, believe that this cherished Christian word should not be surrendered to the Papacy—that such a concession to an arrogant and unwarranted claim of monopolising the Church of Christ is not for a moment to be thought of. Many Protestants feel that, if there is any branch of the Christian church that is not “catholic” in the true meaning of that Christian word, it is the Church of Rome. And what does “Catholic” mean? Let Dr. Alexander White of Scotland answer the question: “The true Catholic is the well-read, open-minded, hospitable-hearted, spiritually exercised Christian. He is of no sect and no school. He belongs to all sects, and all sects belong to him. So far as they have any portion of divine truth in their keeping,

or any evidence of divine grace in their walk and conversation, they all are his fellow-communicants and his brethren. How rich such men are in truth and love and hope! For all things are theirs. All men and all books and all Churches—whether Paul, or John, or Augustine, or Athanasius, or Dante, or Behmen, or Luther, or Calvin, or Hooker, or Taylor, or Knox, or Rutherford, or Bunyan, or Butler, or Edwards, or Chalmers, or Newman, or Spurgeon, all are theirs."

It was in "An Appreciation of John Henry Newman," the ex-Protestant and later Roman Catholic prelate, author of "Lead, Kindly Light," that Dr. White wrote these words of generous recognition of the Catholic Cardinal's place in the one great and true Catholic Church of Christ; but this was in spite of, not because of, his espousal of the Romish faith. Those who, whatever their church and creed, unchurch all followers of Christ who are not identified with and obedient to their own ecclesiastical organisation, and refuse to co-operate in Christian service with any but their own sect, will be the last who can consistently qualify as "Catholics" under the true meaning of the word. True "catholicity" in spirit and in Christian service can alone make any church or any creed a luminous and inviting pathway to God.

If a Creed is to be made a bond of unity in the Church in the largest way, many feel that it should contain only those facts and statements of truth that are cardinal and fundamental to the Christian faith. Is the virgin-birth of Christ such a fact or truth? Many say yes, but many others who believe in it themselves as a fact do not believe that it should be classed among the facts essential to faith in a divine Christ. They believe that a fact of this kind in the life of our Lord which is mentioned only by Matthew and Luke, and is never referred to at all by the two writers (John and Paul) to whom we owe nearly three-fourths of the New Testament—and which not a few devout Christian believers doubt—should not be imposed upon any one as a *sine qua non* of a true and saving faith in Christ. "Christ the Son of God," "Christ and him crucified," and "Christ and the resurrection"—these are the articles of Christian faith, as it pertains to Christ, which

the New Testament writers emphasise as cardinal.<sup>1</sup> As one who believes most profoundly in the truth and abiding value of the Apostles' Creed, and who also believes in the virgin-birth, Dr. G. A. Johnston Ross yet protests against the exaltation of this fact in our Lord's life into a cardinal doctrine of the Christian faith: "It is the grossest travesty upon the position of the Christian Church to say that it demands of its members belief in the virgin-birth as though that were the basis of the Christian faith. The virgin-birth was no part of the earliest known presentation of the Gospel either by our Lord or by his Apostles.<sup>2</sup> . . . The creed first sets before us with an awed impressiveness the person of Jesus—'The Christ, God's only Son, our Lord'—and only then does it go on to speak of the mode of his coming. It behooves us to observe that same order: first, let the personal greatness of the Christ tell fully on our minds—and then in the matter of his birth into our life, as well as in the matter of his resurrection, which was his birth into a yet higher human life, we shall be cleansed of *a priori* dogmatism." But these words need to be supplemented by others from Dr. Ross: "One wonders that any man or woman of pure mind, haunted by the glory of the Christ, could read, say, the first two chapters of St. Luke and note how steeped they are in the glory of God's prior discipline of his people, and how holy, elevated, reticent and virgin-chaste the story is, without becoming convinced that in the deepest sense the story is true, and meant to convey the truth."<sup>3</sup> In thus writing Dr. Ross expresses the faith and the feeling of many others besides himself.

No one familiar with modern Christian thought is unaware of the fact that many Christian people do not believe in the

<sup>1</sup> It is a significant fact, in its bearing on present-day controversies, that in neither of the two official creeds of the early Church, the Nicene and the Athanasian, was there any declaration of faith in the Virgin birth. See J. F. Bethune-Baker's "The Faith of the Apostles' Creed," p. 66.

<sup>2</sup> Thus also Dr. Bruce: "The histories of the infancy in Matthew and Luke do not belong to the original Synoptical tradition. They are a later addition prefixed to the evangelic story." See "Apologetics," pp. 408-409. Nevertheless, like Dr. Ross, Dr. Bruce believes the account of the virgin birth is true no matter when it was added.

<sup>3</sup> "The God We Trust," pp. 74-76.

resurrection of the physical body. Others who do believe in it regard it as in no way essential to the Christian doctrine of the immortality of the human soul. Both of these classes of believers regard it as unfortunate that a creed which is meant to be of universal use should contain any statement of faith to which devout Christian believers, whatever their type of theological opinion, can reasonably object. They feel that no statement on a non-essential and disputed doctrine like this should be in a creed that is to be used in a ritualistic way and recited by a public congregation. If any statement is to be made on this point in the creed, they feel that it should be expressed in the Scripture words "the resurrection of the dead," rather than "the resurrection of the body," seeing that the former phrase, as used by Christ in his reply to the Sadducees, is capable of being interpreted as teaching the continued life of the spirit after death without any implication as to the resurrection of the fleshly body that is laid in the grave. But our concern here and now is not primarily as to whether the resurrection of the physical body is a fact or not, but wholly as to whether it is a help or a hindrance to a creed as a guide-book to God to have in it a statement of this kind. If it is a fundamental feature of the Christian doctrine of immortality, it is proper and right that it should go into the creed; but, if it is not a fundamental, and is not believed by many Christians in our day, the creed would be most useful by its omission.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. *The Athanasian Creed*

Let us imagine, if we can, some one reading to Christ the Athanasian Creed with its multiplied metaphysical declarations and statements concerning God and Himself and the Holy spirit and challenging his approval and confirmation of these declarations. Here is something of what they would read to him:

<sup>1</sup> Among modern-minded theologians who hold that the resurrection of the physical body is an essential part of the Christian doctrine of immortality is Dr. A. B. Bruce. See his "Apologetics," pp. 60, 120.

"Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith; which faith, except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingily. And the catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance. For there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Ghost is all one: the glory equal, the majesty co-eternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost. The Father is uncreated, incomprehensible, eternal, almighty; so is the Son and so the Holy Ghost; and yet there are not three uncreated, three incomprehensibles, three eternals, and three almighty, but only one God. . . .<sup>1</sup> The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God; and yet there are not three Gods, but one God. So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son is Lord and the Holy Ghost is Lord; and yet there are not three Lords, but one Lord. . . . The Father is made of none, neither created nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone, not made, nor created, but begotten. The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son, neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding. . . . And in this Trinity none is afore or after other; none is greater or less than another. But the whole three persons are co-eternal together, and coequal. So that in all things, as is aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped. He, therefore, that will be saved must thus think of the Trinity. Furthermore, it is necessary to everlasting salvation that he also believe rightly the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the right faith is that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and man: God of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds; and man of the substance of his mother, born in the world. . . . Equal to the Father as touching his Godhead, and inferior to the Father as touching his manhood. Who although he be God and man, yet he is not two, but one Christ. One, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking of the manhood into God; one altogether, not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person. . . . This is the catholic faith which except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved."

<sup>1</sup> We abbreviate the original but in no way change the meaning.

While this creed bears the name of Athanasius, it is not thought by church historians that he wrote it. It was at first designated as "the Catholic faith." Among the theological controversies of the fourth century concerning Christ, Athanasius held that Christ was of the *same* substance (*homo-ousios*) with the Father; the semi-Arians held that he was of *like* substance (*homoi-ousios*) with the Father; the Arians held that he was of *different* substance (*heterousios*) from the Father. The view of Athanasius prevailed and came to be accepted as the orthodox catholic doctrine, and it is that interpretation of Christ's person which finds expression in this creed. This fact doubtless led to its being called by his name. Among the earliest, bitterest and longest doctrinal controversies that ever took place in the history of the Christian Church was that which centred in the question as to whether the Greek word that defined the relation of Christ's nature to that of the Father should be spelt with or without the letter "i"—*homo-ousia* or *homoi-ousia*, "sameness of substance" or "likeness of substance." The former became (and remains to this day) the watch-word of catholic orthodoxy. The bitterness of this controversy doubtless accounts for the strong "damnable clauses" of the Athanasian creed. It may not be generally known that this creed, which we now read as a literary and theological curiosity, is still, in spite of these objectionable clauses, officially in force not only in the Greek Catholic and Roman Catholic Churches, but in the Church of England also, though it is omitted from the canons of the Protestant Episcopal Church in America.

That it was in the moulds of these early historic creeds that the once plastic doctrine of Deity now designated as the Trinity, took the fixed form it now bears, is a matter of history. This term, the "Trinity," and the conception of Deity for which it stands, may be said to represent the Christian doctrine of God as interpreted in the terms of metaphysical and philosophical theology. But while the "Trinity" may be recognised as the most characteristic theological term for designating the Christian doctrine of God, and while it may be conceded that all these minutely described distinctions in the

Godhead which are brought out in such manifold detail in the Athanasian creed are involved in our present doctrine of the Trinity, nothing could show how different are our thoughts about God from the thoughts of the Nicene and post-Nicene age than the reading of this creed. It is utterly inconceivable that any representative body of Christian men who should be called on in our day to draw up in brief form a statement of the fundamental facts and features of our present Christian conception of God,—called on to do this in a manner that would help men in our day to believe in God, and draw them to his worship and service—it is inconceivable that their work would find expression in credal statements even remotely resembling this ancient Confession of Catholic faith. And yet if that creed is what men needed in that day to help them to interpret God and believe in him, it is exactly what they ought to have had prepared for them. And we must believe that a creed that should have been so widely recognised as expressing “the catholic faith” of that age, and that was given the name of the great and honoured exponent of orthodoxy in that age, was indeed surely the kind of message that was needed then. All that we are saying is that *that* is not the way to interpret and present God to our generation.

### 3. *The Westminster Confession of Faith*

#### (1) *The Providential Mission of Calvinism*

No one familiar with the history of Protestantism can fail to recognise and acknowledge the great contribution which Calvinism has made to modern Christianity. To offset the arrogant claims and pretensions and practices of the Church of Rome in the sixteenth century, which led to the reaction under Martin Luther, a theology was needed that had granite in its body, grey matter in its brain, and iron in its blood. Calvinism furnished these needed ingredients in its dogmatic theology. Reactions as a rule go to extremes. The swinging pendulum, let loose at one extreme, cannot stop until it has gone to another. To meet and offset the Papal claim to sovereignty over Church and State as well as over the individual

conscience, Protestantism set up the Sovereignty of Almighty God and the infallibility of a divinely inspired and inerrant Bible. The momentum and impact of Calvinism upon minds emancipated from the thralldom of Romish authority and superstition was so great that the freedmen did not see, and did not want to see, that the interpretation of God in terms of Sovereignty which characterised the theology of Protestantism, was pressed too far—to the very borders of absolute despotism. The theology of Calvinism had so much that was true in it that the system as a whole grew and gained widespread influence, in spite of what we now regard as serious error in its interpretation of the Divine Being. It is the error that is coupled with or clothed in truth that is most difficult to detect and correct. We are now wondering how it is that such exaggerations of divine Sovereignty and such limitations and discriminations in the divine love as Calvinism attributed to God could have so long dominated the theology of the Church. One explanation is found in the clear and strong credal expression that was given to this system of theological thought; and the strongest of all these formal statements of Calvinistic thought is that found in the Westminster Confession of Faith. It has been called the Gibraltar of Calvinism.

### (2) *The God of Calvinism*

It was a scholarly and catholic-minded Presbyterian, the late eminent historian, Dr. Philip Schaff, who wrote as follows concerning the Calvinistic doctrine of God:

"The scholastic Calvinists of the seventeenth century mounted the Alpine heights of eternal decrees with intrepid courage, and revelled in the reverential contemplations of the awful majesty of God, which required the damnation of the great mass of sinners, including untold millions of heathen and infants, for the manifestation of his terrible justice. Inside the circle of the elect all was bright and delightful in the sunshine of infinite mercy, but outside all was darker than midnight. This system of doctrine commands our respect, for it has produced the most earnest and heroic Christians; but it is, nevertheless, austere and repulsive. It glorifies the

justice of God above his mercy; it savours more of the Old Testament than of the New, and is better at home on Mount Sinai than on Calvary. 'God is love,' and love is the only key that can unlock the deepest meaning of his words and works."

But the emphasis in the faith and preaching of the present-day followers of Calvin, as of all other types of theology, is upon the Fatherhood and love of God rather than upon his sovereignty and justice, upon the largeness and graciousness of Christ's atoning work for all mankind rather than upon the limitation and partiality of redemption, upon the moral free agency and responsibility of man rather than upon the unconditional election and reprobation of men before they are born. "The five knotty points of Calvinism," says Dr. Schaff, "have lost their point and have been smoothed off by God's own working in the history of the Church."

But if this quotation from Dr. Schaff seems to belong to a past generation too remote to represent modern thought, let us turn to the last session of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland and quote from a report<sup>1</sup> of the address delivered before that body by Dr. Garvie, the author of many well known volumes:

"Dr. Garvie, who fills a more important place with each year, spoke with characteristic and welcome frankness. When it is remembered that the Free Churches have within their borders thinkers from the extreme left of theology to the extreme right, it will be seen that Dr. Garvie did valuable service in claiming freedom for those who, with him, believe in the progressive revelation in the Bible, and have escaped from the blight of Calvinism. On second adventist doctrines he spoke words which will not be without their interest in America. 'Why I myself do not believe in the second adventist doctrine, as it is now being widely preached, is that I believe so profoundly and so unreservedly in the sufficiency of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord that I cannot believe that the best God can do is to wind up his world as a bankrupt concern. I believe with all my heart that God would never have created a race that he could not redeem, and that Jesus Christ

<sup>1</sup> See "The Christian Century," April 3, 1924.

is great enough to be the world's Redeemer. As I have already indicated, universalism goes beyond what we can confidently affirm. But that God will do his utmost to save in Jesus Christ, that our Christian faith compels us, compels me at least, to believe.' "

### (3) *Revision by Reinterpretation*

The modern Church has witnessed more than one attempt to revise the Westminster Confession, the Thirty-nine Articles and other Calvinistic statements of faith. The serious problem that has confronted the revisers of the Westminster Confession has been how they might get the doctrines of the loving Fatherhood of God, the unlimited atonement of Christ and the moral free agency of man into the creed and yet retain Calvinism in its cardinal and distinctive features. It simply cannot be done. To hold to unconditional election and reprobation in eternity by the Divine will, and at the same time believe in and hold to the three doctrines just named is, intellectually, an impossibility.

That these three doctrines have long been demanded by the advocates for a revision of the Westminster Confession may be shown by two quotations from eminent Presbyterian divines. In a public discussion of the subject of revision that took place a few years ago in the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, Dr. MacCracken, then Vice Chancellor of New York University, said:

"There was a certain choice given us by the President of Princeton, in his recent paper, between Augustine and Comte, Jonathan Edwards and John Stuart Mill—if I rightly recall the names—at any rate, between Christian necessitarians and anti-Christian necessitarians. I respectfully decline to choose. I am like the coloured man who, when told by his preacher, 'There is a broad road that leads down to destruction, and a narrow road that leads up to perdition,' said, 'Then this coloured man will take to the woods.' I betake myself to the free territory of a self-determined will. I leave the explanation of exactly how God renews my will to the unexplained and inexplicable mysteries of the Almighty. I say with Dr. Hodge,

the younger, in his Philadelphia lecture delivered shortly before his death: 'The need of the hour is not to emphasise fore-ordination, but to unite with our Arminian brethren in putting all emphasis and concentrating all attention on the vital fact of human freedom.'

Dr. Charles H. Parkhurst, in the same discussion, said:

"If now we are going to retain this preterition idea in our Confession, then we must be true to it in our preaching as Presbyterian ministers and on occasion declare it in all frankness. We shall be obliged to address our congregations somewhat after this manner: My friends, I am sorry to say it, but as a Calvinist Presbyterian I am bound to say it, that Christ did not die for all. There is a certain amount of fatalism in the case. Some men are damned, and not only that, but congenitally damned, damned before they are born, hated of God even in the moment of conception."

"Oh, no!" said Dr. W. M. Paxton, interrupting the speaker at this point.

"My good Brother Paxton says, 'Oh, no.' Well, it is a pretty hard way of stating the case, and I would hardly have ventured to put it in this way if I had not heard Dr. Paxton's exposition of the matter last Monday afternoon. But the story of Jacob and Esau, as interpreted by the hyper-Calvinists, means all that, when you tell the whole thing out in flat-footed English. Now if I concluded that that was a Scriptural doctrine, and that salvation was not absolutely free to every creature, I would tear my Geneva gown to shreds, and rip up my Bible into paper rags before another Sabbath, and my elders and deacons and all my Church membership, I believe, would stand by me."

At the session of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church which some years ago welcomed back to its folds the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, the following resolutions, which were offered by an ex-Moderator, Dr. J. D. Moffatt, were adopted as a supplementary declaration concerning the belief which is now expected of those who join the Presbyterian Church: "(1) That in the Presbyterian Church no acceptance

of the doctrines of the Church is required of any communicant beyond personal faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Saviour of the world and sincere acceptance of him as Lord and Master. (2) That ministers, ruling elders, and deacons, in expressing approval of the Westminster Confession of Faith, are required to assent only to the system of doctrine established therein, and not to every particular statement. (3) It is further declared to be no longer allowable to interpret that system of doctrine in any fatalistic sense." Of course there are many "particular statements" to which the Cumberland Presbyterians will not give their assent. This third declaration is remarkable in that it concedes that the Westminster Confession has not only been interpreted in a "fatalistic sense" in the past, but such interpretation has been allowed. Is it surprising that an increasing number of Presbyterians have been calling for a Confession of Faith which shall not need any supplementary declaration forbidding readers to interpret it in a "fatalistic sense"?

Most interesting is the answer which the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland has given to this last question by preparing and submitting to their people a new statement of Christian faith for their calm consideration. It is indeed a clear and remarkably satisfactory statement of Christian faith. The fact that it emanates from a Church historically famous as defenders of Calvinism, and yet omits all the objectionable features of Calvinistic theology so thoroughly that Arminian Methodists could without embarrassment subscribe to most if not all of its statements, gives promise of an earlier unity and agreement in matters of faith than had hitherto been thought possible.

#### 4. *The Thirty-nine Articles*

The Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England, from which the Twenty-five Articles of the Methodist Church were taken, were written in 1551 by Cranmer (probably), being approved by King Edward and others in authority. As first drawn up they were forty-two in number; but after changes by Bishop Parker and further alterations which reduced the

number to thirty-nine, they were adopted by the English Convocation in 1562-63; but not until the Convocation of 1571 did they receive their present final form. These Articles have been storm centres of controversy more than once in the past hundred years. It is with their statements concerning God that we are here and now especially concerned.

The first article concerning the Divine Being reads as follows: "There is but one living and true God, without body, parts or passions; of infinite power, wisdom and goodness; the Maker and Preserver of all things both visible and invisible; and in unity of this God-head there are three persons, of one substance, power and eternity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost." The most superficial reading of this article cannot fail to reveal the absence of any mention of what we now regard as the two most distinguishing attributes of the Divine Being, his holiness and love. Nor does this article set forth what Christ made most conspicuous in his revelation of God, namely, his sustaining the relation of Father to all men, for the divine Fatherhood mentioned has reference wholly to his personality and place in the Trinity of the Godhead, his relation to the second and third Persons of the Trinity. Whatever an article of faith concerning God contains or omits, if it is to meet the needs of our day, it must not only mention but emphasise the three great truths about God that are conspicuously absent here—his holiness, his love and his precious relation to men as the heavenly Father.

Consider, again, the conception of God contained in the statement of the doctrine of atonement that is found in the last part of the second Article: "Christ truly suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried, to reconcile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for the actual sins of men." Now this Article, in making the main purpose of Christ's sufferings and death to be to appease the wrath of God and reconcile him to men, represents a doctrine of atonement that has few defenders in the modern Church, which believes, with Paul, that God is now, and has ever been, "In Christ reconciling the world unto himself." In other

words the atoning work of Christ is designed to reveal the love of God and not the hate and wrath of God. The men who wrote this Article evidently did not believe in the sovereignty of divine love among the attributes of God. If it be true that the necessity of atonement is found in the justice of God, it is also and even more true, if one truth can be truer than another, that the origin of atonement is found in the love of God, and the method of atonement in the wisdom of God. The statement of the doctrine of atonement that finds expression in this Article in the judgment of many, unduly exaggerates the justice and wrath of God as compared with his wisdom and love. The grandest expression of love for a sinful world that a Father can make is to give his Son for their salvation; the grandest expression of love that a Son can make is to give himself in voluntary self-sacrifice for the world's redemption. These are the potent and precious truths about the atonement as related to God and man that are everywhere emphasised in the New Testament, and the Church of to-day is calling for a creed that shall contain a statement of the doctrine of atonement which, while neglecting no truth, will keep the emphasis where the New Testament places it, on the love of God.

### III

#### NEED FOR NEW CREDAL STATEMENTS OF CHRISTIAN FAITH

"I can wish the Churches no better fate," says Sir Henry Jones in beginning his recent lectures on the Gifford Foundation at the University of Glasgow, "than that henceforth they shall regard the articles of their creeds as objects of unsparing intellectual enquiry. Enquiry not only establishes the truth of the main elements of the doctrines which the Churches inculcate, but it transmutes and enriches their meaning."

Another distinguished Scotchman,<sup>1</sup> in a still more recent

<sup>1</sup> There are few things more notable in modern theological thought than the rebound against creeds and against high Calvinism that is so manifest in the utterances of present-day Scotch theologians. Scotland was once the headquarters of English Calvinism and the strongest champion of the

volume, has uttered words of similar import. In his volume titled "Religion and Modern Thought," Dr. George Galloway, Principal of St. Mary's College, University of St. Andrews, says:

"It would mean a gain for religion if some of the old metaphysical and legal notions, as well as pre-scientific ideas, which have found a place in our Confessional systems, were officially relegated to the background. For they belong to a vanished world; they cannot be made to live again; and they hinder rather than help faith. On the other hand, along with this liberating process, there must go an earnest endeavour to set what is essential in the foreground of religious faith. The things which really matter most must receive an added emphasis. In this we shall be guided by keeping steadily in mind the vital and enduring elements of the Christian experience. This experience has its centre and living ground in the revelation of God in Christ, and, despite all the chance and change of human things, and through all the passing fashions of an ageing world, it has maintained itself. Here is the living core of our Christian faith, and the doctrines in which that experience is enshrined will remain an abiding inheritance of the Christian Church."

### *I. New Bottles for the New Wine*

In view of the foregoing facts we cannot wonder that the late Dr. A. B. Bruce, of Scotland, expressed himself on this subject in the following language, which is even truer of our day than it was of his:

"What to do with our creeds has become for all the Churches a burning question. That these creeds, centuries old, no longer express perfectly, or even approximately, the living faith of the Church, is being frankly acknowledged on every side. The free expression of the faith and spiritual life of former genera-

type of orthodoxy embodied in the Westminster Confession of Faith. Now there is no country where modern thought has, unchallenged, freer and stronger expression than in Scotland, much of it being critical of traditional Scotch Calvinism. The reader cannot fail to note how many Scotchmen are quoted as speaking in favour of creed revision.

tions, they have become a bondage to the spirit and a snare to the conscience."

He thinks what is needed is a "return to the Gospels and to the Christianity of Christ," and that "a fresh intuition of Christ and a new religious life that would flow from it" would result in a "fresh formulation of Christian belief, bearing an entirely different stamp from that of the historical Protestant confessions."

Professor James Simpson, the successor of Henry Drummond in the Free Church College of Edinburgh, is authority for the statement that to-day the Scotch Church generally and as a whole occupies the theological position held by the men whom a generation ago it charged with heresy. "Jesus Christ," says Professor Simpson, "showed us what is eternally true in the heart of God. But the way we think of God and his work and purpose in the world must be modified to some extent, and is richly increased by the revelation which he has made of himself in science and in history. Each generation has a right to demand that its knowledge and reinterpretation of God shall be stated in the light of the new knowledge that that generation has attained. It is only when there is an attempt to insist that the forms and categories of truth that dominated the thinking of a past generation shall be held as absolute for the new generation that difficulty arises. The result of this attitude of freedom on the part of the Scotch Church is that the young people are rallying around the Church as they had not done previously."<sup>1</sup>

Another influential leader and outspoken thinker of English Christianity who feels that the traditional creeds and inherited dogmas of the Church are a yoke around the neck and an impediment to progress in the thought and work of the Church is Dean Inge, whose "Outspoken Essays" and "Confessio Fidei" are among the most thought-provoking and stimulating of recent theological books. He regards "the immobility of

<sup>1</sup> Professor Simpson is best known as the author of the two volumes titled "The Spiritual Interpretation of Nature" and "Man and the Attainment of Immortality," works which interpret nature, man and God from the point of view of theistic evolution.

dogma" as one of the gravest of the dangers confronting the Church. It is, he thinks, a peril to honest thinking and tends to produce intellectual dishonesty in the Church. Traditional orthodoxy "outrages our sense of truth and honesty by demanding our assent to scientific errors which were exploded centuries ago." The "gloomy dean," as he is called, doubtless exaggerates the dangers that threaten the modern Church from the trammels of traditionalism, but it is well to quote his words, for he is not alone in believing that a reinterpretation of Christianity in larger and more liberal terms and a restatement of Christian faith with a new emphasis upon the great ethical and spiritual doctrines of religion are called for in our day. He writes:

"If ever a Church alienates from itself not only the best intellect, but the best conscience of the nation so that these forces no longer exert any pressure upon its action, the descent to Avernus is easy and the return very difficult. Its rulers are led by the real or supposed necessity of representing and conciliating a less and less respectable clientèle, and the public ceases to look for wisdom or guidance from the official spokesmen of the Church. If our leaders were wise in their generation they would make a great effort to check the progressive alienation of vigorous and independent thought from Christianity. They would have the courage to disregard the prejudices of the church-going public, and would appeal to the conscience and intelligence of a wider circle."

New creeds have always come in connection with forward movements in faith; and, though every inch in the advance has to be fought for, new heights once gained are always held. There is no instance in the history of religious thought where outgrown and discarded conceptions of religious truths are restored in later creeds. This is because reinterpretations in religion seek to extract out of the old whatever elements of truth are in it, and these are incorporated into the new statements of truth. This is progressive conservatism, which preserves and perpetuates the truth of the past, as opposed to re-

version, which seeks to revive and restore that in the past which has become obsolete and can come no more to life again. In all these creeds and confessions of faith that have registered forward movements in the Church there have been perishable elements of wood, hay and stubble, but there have also been elements of gold and silver that represent the imperishable truths of faith, which, when tried as by fire, are found to be indestructible. These permanent elements in religion constitute the inner mind and ever-growing spirit of Christian faith, while the mutable elements represent the outer body, always disintegrating and yet unceasingly renewed. How much better it is for mortals such as we are to have liberty in thinking and freedom in believing, as God in his wisdom has given us, than to have been given at the start an absolutely complete and accurate and authoritative creed, unchangeable in every detail because of its fixedness and exactness which left nothing to be thought out differently. A human history abounding in heresies and conflicting creeds, each contending that it is the true faith first delivered to the saints, is infinitely preferable to a faith as fixed and unalterable as the multiplication table. How much better than credal immutability and finality is it for us to have endless opportunities for truth-seeking, and be in a world full of variety, where as a man thinketh in his heart so is he, and where according to the measure of one's faith is life made rich or poor in the things of greatest value. God has wisely left us free, within limits duly imposed by reason, to determine what we shall believe even about himself. Because he has done this, Personality, both his and ours, becomes richer and infinitely more significant than if our minds had been made to fit immutable intellectual moulds and that would be the case if our conception of Deity were determined by a kind of astronomical mathematics or logical syllogism that should formulate and fix every detail of thought concerning him. The fact that theology is a speculative and not a fixed and immutable science carries in it the promise and inspiration of endless progress in man's efforts to understand and interpret the God whom he worships.

2. *Old and New Ideas of Creeds*

A Christian creed ought to be a real living force in guiding unbelievers, in educating and building up believers, and in evangelising the world. The Church creeds, however (excepting the one simple, brief Apostles' Creed), have fallen into disrepute not only with men of the world but to a large extent with members of the Church also. The popular conception of a church creed is that it is a series of theological statements that are dry and cold and hard, something scholastic and skeletonic, antiquated and obsolete, uninteresting, lifeless, incapable of stirring the mind to think great and holy thoughts, or the heart to aspire after that which is lofty and divine, something chiefly useful for preventing heresy and safeguarding orthodoxy. These venerable creeds that now seem so dead were once an expression of the living thought of believers and filled a large place in the conscious life of the Church. But they belong now to the history of Christian doctrine and have little to do with the conscious thought and life of the Church to-day. The time is coming, however, if it be not already here, when a new expression of the faith, experience, purpose, and life of the Church will be demanded and be forthcoming. No one familiar with the history of the Church can fail to recognise the power and persistence of creeds. If they have been such in the past, they can be made such in the future. But, if a creed is to be a force working for truth and righteousness, it must be, whatever else it may or may not be, such a simple, clear and strong statement of the truth concerning God that men will find in it a luminous pathway for pilgrims travelling through a sin-darkened world.

The old idea of a creed as something to bind men's faith and furnish a test by which heresy can be determined and condemned is largely a thing of the past. The new creed is positive, not negative; something to help, not to hinder; to free, not to bind; inclusive, not exclusive; educational and progressive, not holding down and back; evangelistic, and not scholastic; irenic, and not polemic. The Church needs a statement of faith that it can take to thinking and truth-seeking

men and say, not "Here is something you shall believe," but rather "Here is something so reasonable and Scriptural and true that if you will only read and examine it you will believe it."

If the time ever comes when a Church holds on to a creed for any other reason than that it is a true expression of its present living and abiding faith, then it is no longer an expression of *faith*, even though it be called such—it becomes then an impediment to progress, a source of decay and death and not of life and growth. A creed that is really believed does not need to be preserved by a law making it difficult or well-nigh impossible to alter it.

Among the notable utterances of the moderator of a late session of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland is the following: "The creed of the Church of the future will not be an assent to a form of words but consent to a way of life." Just before his death the late Dr. John Watson (Ian Maclaren) said that one of the greatest needs of the modern Church is an ethical creed—a creed that will give an important place to a timely and well-worded declaration that will serve to show that the Church recognises its great mission in the world to be to make *men*, to make men by preaching a gospel that will regulate conduct, develop moral character, and thus produce noble types of manhood and womanhood. Christ has come into this world and established his Church for the one great purpose of making men. Doctrines and Church creeds and Churches themselves are worth just so much, in the last analysis, as they have power to make a noble type of manhood and womanhood. More than upon anything else the power of the Church to make men depends upon its interpretation of God as the heavenly Father and its insistence that men be like him in holiness and love. Fatherhood, holiness and love—let no interpretation of God that seeks to meet the religious needs of the day in which we live fail to give these most essential divine attributes a foremost place in its creed.



CHAPTER EIGHTEEN  
THROUGH DOUBT TO FAITH



## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

### THROUGH DOUBT TO FAITH

#### I

#### THE RELATION OF FAITH TO REASON AND RELIGION

An important office of human reason in the realm of religion is to forbid the human mind to believe anything until the proper evidence has been furnished. If faith is belief upon evidence, then there can be no real faith without the exercise of reason. We are justified by faith only, according to Paul, but faith is justified only by facts, by facts spiritual and invisible as well as by facts physical and visible. Unless we were so constituted intellectually as to doubt until reasonable evidence is furnished, the human mind could be easily imposed upon in matters of faith. To doubt at the right place and for the right cause is the best cure for doubt, and to believe at the wrong place and on insufficient grounds is the surest road to scepticism. To doubt things that ought to be doubted is the surest road to a rational faith in things that ought to be believed.

#### *1. The Office of Doubt in Religion*

In no sphere of human life does a man need to be protected against error and credulity so much as in religion. Sometimes to find the real and true God one must needs doubt the traditional and prevailing doctrine concerning him. Christian biography reveals the fact that many of the most influential leaders of religious thought have attained a satisfying faith only after having themselves passed through periods of doubt and scepticism born of honest and earnest inquiry. The men that have successfully fought their way through doubts are they who have thought their way through, through intellectual difficulties as to the truth of some of the accepted facts and

doctrines of the Church, and this sometimes in the face of much and severe criticism. Take men of the type of Frederick W. Robertson, Henry Drummond, Horace Bushnell and other "heretics of yesterday." Many might be named who passed through painful periods of doubt and struggle in their search for God. It is men who have dared to doubt, and yet who, unwilling to stop there, have thought things through, who as a rule have won peace of mind for themselves and have shown a courage of conviction and of utterance that has inspired others with confidence in the sincerity and genuineness of their faith.

They who honestly and frankly call in question things that ought to be doubted, and not only doubted but disputed and denied, may be the heretics of to-day, but they will be the orthodox leaders and heroes of faith for to-morrow. Think of what misinterpretations of God, amounting almost to caricatures of him, have at times been included among the accepted and orthodox doctrines of the Church in the past, at least of great sections of the Church—for example, that God's decrees of reprobation consigned multitudes to hell before they were even born; and again, that Christ had appointed the Pope of Rome to be his vicegerent on earth and committed to his keeping the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and such like doctrines. Whenever such things are taught, is not the first step in the pathway to a true faith in God to doubt and deny whatever is so manifestly inconsistent with the true character of the real and true God? And may it not be that there are in present popular conceptions of God and divine Providence some ideas that are misleading and some conceptions which are really misconceptions; and if so, may it not be that only from and through those who dare to doubt and call in question such conceptions as are mixed with hurtful error will better interpretations and truer conceptions of God come to prevail. Thomas doubted, said St. Augustine, that we might not doubt. It may be a paradox, but it is nevertheless true, that doubt is one of the paths to faith in God.

If there is ever to come any unity in the faith, any common agreement as to what "the truth as it is in Jesus" really is,

it will come only after some have dared not only to believe, but to doubt, seeing that daring to believe sometimes manifests itself first in daring to doubt. But the doubt that is honest and truth-seeking, and that has rich hope of reward in its ultimate vindication is not to be recognised as a normal and permanent state of mind. It is a transitional state of mind that belongs to the earnest investigator and truth-seeker who is pressing his way out of darkness and uncertainty into light and into the assurance of faith.

Of the different conceptions of God that prevail in the world, and how men have come to entertain these different views concerning the Divine Being, Dr. L. P. Jacks, Principal of Manchester College, Oxford, has written the following words which cannot fail to commend themselves to every thoughtful reader as having much of truth in them. He warns us against attaching too much value to methods of proving God's existence and character from and through supposed analogies to human relationships—such an argument for instance as that based on the resemblance between human and divine government. The true God, he thinks, is more likely to be found in doubting than in believing these arguments and analogies. In his volume titled "Religious Perplexities," he says:

"In all ages the attempt has been made to domesticate the idea of God to the secular purposes of individuals and of groups. If we examine the current forms of the idea we may observe the marks of this domesticating process at many points. For example, the idea of God as the sovereign potentate, governing the universe under a system of iron law, the legislator of nature and the taskmaster of the soul, the rewarder of them that obey and the punisher of them that disobey, is plainly an idea borrowed from politics, the form of the idea most convenient to those who need God as an ally in the maintenance of law and order as they conceive them.

"This does not prove the idea untrue to reality; it may conceivably be used as a strong argument to the contrary. At the same time it puts us on our guard, warning us to look out for other forms of 'domestication' which may be less in accord with essential truth than the one I have just mentioned. Certainly it is extremely difficult to find any form of the idea

of God which has retained a purely spiritual or religious character throughout the entire course of its history. Between the conception of Deity implied in the teachings of Jesus and the conception as it appears in 'God save the King' the distance is immense; and few theologians I imagine would be so hardy or so patriotic as to affirm that the latter conception is nearer to the Divine Reality.

"The theologian who takes up the proof of the existence of God should make it clear, both to himself and to his audience, at which end of this long line, which has not been one of 'development,' he lays the emphasis. Any proof of the existence of 'the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ' would certainly prove the non-existence of the Being adumbrated in 'God save the King'; and vice versa. Which may be expanded into a more general proposition. Reasons given in favour of a spiritual or religious conception of God become less and less valid exactly in proportion as we approach its secular modifications; while reasons given in favour of these latter are worthless as proofs of the spiritual reality. Most of our difficulties in believing in God arise from the fact that God in our meaning of the term, is no longer 'Spirit' (as Jesus said), but Spirit shorn of its freedom and reduced to the dimensions of some human utility or purpose—that is, not 'Spirit' at all.

"For these reasons I will venture to suggest to any one who is perplexed by doubts about the reality of God, not to trust the fortunes of his faith too unreservedly to the field of mere argumentation. If he does so he runs a serious risk of falling, without being aware of it, into one of the many grooves of thought, which alien interests have cut deep into the ground of theological controversy, leading the mind in a direction contrary to that in which spiritual reality is to be found. Neither let him deem himself an atheist because he cannot believe in the Deity adumbrated by 'God save the King.' Rather let him conceive it possible that God is speaking to him in his refusal to believe in that God. Let him seek God in the very heart of his doubts about God."

## 2. *Dishonest Doubt*

"How long dost thou make us to doubt?" said the Jews to Christ, "If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly." Some sceptics

try to make it appear, or at least to persuade themselves, that God, or the Bible, or the Christian religion, is responsible for their doubt. "How long dost thou make us to doubt?"—thou art responsible for our doubt! The inference is that if Christ would tell them plainly, they would believe on him, and become his obedient disciples. Let us see if such was the case. "Jesus answered them, I have told you already, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me." But still, as ye call for a *plain* answer concerning my Messiahship and Divinity, I will give it: "I and my Father are one." Can anything plainer than that be spoken? But did they believe? No: "Then they took up stones to stone him." This reveals the animus and spirit of their scepticism. This proves the truth of what Jesus had said unto them: "Ye believe not because ye are not of my sheep. My sheep hear my voice and follow me." The real cause of scepticism in most instances is not that the intellectual conditions of faith are wanting, but the heart conditions in the unbeliever are wanting. "The carnal mind is enmity against God."

In a certain literary circle, where scepticism was quite popular, some slighting allusions were made, on a certain important occasion, to the Christian religion. So uncalled for were these allusions and so captious the spirit that prompted them, that one who was present—himself a literary man and no professed defender of the faith—could not resist the temptation to administer the following just rebuke: "It will be found that any form of Christianity, whatever its defects and imperfections, which has an open Bible and proclaims a crucified and risen Christ is infinitely preferable to any form of polite and polished scepticism which gathers as its votaries the degenerate sons of heroic ancestors, who, having been trained in a society and educated in schools, the foundations of which were laid by men of faith and piety, now turn and kick down the ladder by which they have climbed up, and persuade men to live without God, and leave them to die without hope. The worst kind of religion is no religion at all; and these men, living in ease and luxury, indulging themselves in the amuse-

ment of going without religion, may be thankful that they live in lands where the Gospel they neglect has tamed the beastliness and ferocity of the men who, but for Christianity, might long ago have eaten their carcasses like the South Sea Islanders, or cut off their heads and tanned their hides like the monsters of the French Revolution. When the microscopic search of scepticism, which had hunted the heavens and sounded the seas to disprove the existence of a Creator, has turned its attention to human society, and has found a place on this planet ten miles square where a decent man can live in decency, comfort, and security, supporting and educating his children unspoiled and unpolluted; a place where age is reverenced, infancy respected, womanhood honoured, and human life held in due regard—when sceptics can find such a place ten miles square on this globe, where the Gospel of Christ has not gone and cleared the way and laid the foundations and made decency and security possible, it will then be in order for the sceptical *literati* to move thither and there ventilate their views. But so long as these very men are dependent upon the religion which they discard for every privilege they enjoy, they may well hesitate a little before they seek to rob the Christian of his hope and humanity of its faith in the Saviour who alone has given to man that hope of life eternal which makes life tolerable and society possible, and robs death of its terrors and the grave of its gloom.”<sup>1</sup>

### 3. *When No Doubt Means No Faith*

Sometimes never to doubt means never to believe. Some never doubt anything much and never believe anything much. They look to others to tell them what to believe. Intelligent doubt often leads to the careful examination of evidence, which, when found conclusive, leads to the strongest faith. To believe without evidence is credulity, not faith. Faith is belief upon evidence. To avow belief too readily is the surest proof that there is no real faith. The Scotch told King Charles that if he would accept and subscribe to their creed, they would

<sup>1</sup> These words are attributed to James Russell Lowell; but their force and significance depend not upon the person uttering them, but upon their truth in describing the unreasonableness and insincerity of such forms of religious doubt as those here described.

support his royal cause against his political enemies. They brought the documents to him to read and sign, if he found that he could do so conscientiously and sincerely. "Oh, it is not necessary to read it," said he; "give me the pen; I believe it." But the Scotch were quick to see that such ready belief and acceptance as that, without any examination whatever, was no belief at all; and so they put no faith in his fidelity.

There is more faith in honest doubt, as Tennyson has told us, than in a faith that blindly accepts what it is bidden to believe. There were once in the same class in a theological school two students, one of whom dared to express a doubt of the correctness of a certain doctrine of the Church to which they both belonged, while the other declared that he believed every doctrine of the Church to which they belonged—said he asked only to be told what his Church taught, that he had promised to believe the doctrines and obey the rules of the Church and he simply wanted to be told clearly and fully what he was to believe. He was very critical of his classmate referred to because he dared to doubt a doctrine which his Church taught. And what was the sequel as to these two types of believers? The man that dared to doubt became one of the best of believers in Christianity and in the doctrinal system of his Church; and became an influential Christian leader in his state, highly respected by those without as well as those within the Church. At the end of some twelve or fifteen years, the man who was ready to believe without question anything and everything that his Church taught, had gotten out of the ministry and later was reported to have "kicked out of the Church, quite disgusted with it." Of course a man does not have to be a doubter of the doctrines of his Church in order to prove the honesty and sincerity of his faith. But while "standardised believers in standardised creeds" may seem, in the eyes of some, to constitute the ideal Church, more intelligent and loyal in their faith, more effective in their service and more helpful in their ministry, are those who dare to call in question doctrine which they honestly doubt. To accept tentatively things which others hand over to us may represent the first form and stage of belief; but he who stops there,

never thinking things through for himself, never attains to that intelligent type of faith that alone makes one capable of enterprising and accomplishing great things.

## II

## SOME TYPES OF HONEST DOUBT

I. *Doubt Due to Temperament*

Some people are by nature credulous; they believe readily, and require little or no evidence. Others are by nature sceptical; they are slow to accept statements that demand faith, and they require much and strong evidence before they will believe. To the former class Peter belonged; his impulsive nature was quick to believe and quick to act. Thomas belonged to the latter class. He was slow to believe, and he demanded strong and full evidence before he would believe. But our Lord, though he somewhat chided, yet had respect unto his scepticism. It was honest. The faith of the latter class when once secured is stronger and more deeply felt, and possessed of more value, than that of the former. None of the holy apostles was more faithful and firm in his loyalty to Christ than Thomas. He was utterly incapable of doing what Judas or Peter did. While no other apostle doubted as Thomas did, yet none, when convinced, believed as he did. His confession of faith and his testimony to the divinity of Christ after the resurrection were clearer and stronger than came from any other apostle: "My Lord and my God!" I have always been glad that the sceptic Thomas was among the apostles. His belief is the best evidence of all. I know that if he, with his cautious and sceptical temperament, was convinced, there was certainly no mistake about the resurrection. Peter might have been deceived; Thomas never. Saint Augustine had this in mind when he said that "Thomas doubted that we might not doubt." Neither Christ nor Christianity lost anything by the scepticism of Thomas, but gained much every way, and his scepticism is indeed now numbered among the credentials of Christianity. "He doubted that we might not doubt," and he also believed that we might believe.

*2. Doubt Due to Trying Conditions and Experiences*

Nor is this the only instance found in the New Testament where doubt ministered to faith. Take the case of John the Baptist in prison, sending his disciples to Jesus to know if He was the Christ. John could not understand how it was that, if Christ were really divine, he would suffer him to be cast into a dungeon and detained there for no other crime than the simple and honest discharge of his duty as a preacher of righteousness. Can it be that the omniscient and omnipotent Son of God will sit quietly by and see a wicked and heartless tyrant imprison and put to death his own forerunner and prophet who in the faithful and fearless discharge of his duty has denounced the wickedness of royalty? How can Christ be divine and suffer this outrageous wrong? That was the question that confronted John as he sat in his loneliness amid the dingy walls and foul atmosphere of the gloomy dungeon of Machærus, awaiting his execution. He did not deny that Jesus was the Christ, but he was thrown into doubts, he began to question, he could not understand, he sought and needed reassurance—and this notwithstanding the fact that he had baptised Christ and seen the divine attestation that accompanied that event. John's state of mind was not unnatural in view of all the circumstances. But his doubt was sincere and honest, and it is both interesting and instructive to see how the Master met it. He bade the messengers take their seat and wait. He was busy. "And in that same hour Jesus cured many of their diseases and plagues and evil spirits; and on many that were blind he bestowed sight. And then he answered and said unto them, Go your way and tell John what things ye have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached unto them. And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me and find a stumbling-block to his faith in what I fail to do."

That message was answer enough. It was all that John needed to reassure him that Jesus was the Christ; and even more, perhaps, was it what John's disciples needed to prepare

them for becoming believing and loyal disciples of Christ after their own loved leader should be no longer with them. And how much our own faith in Christ and in Christianity is enriched by this episode in the life of our Lord, which would not have occurred if John had not doubted and dared to give expression to his doubt. If Thomas doubted that we might not doubt, just as truly may we say that John the Baptist doubted that we might not only believe but have greater faith in our faith as a result of his doubting. To this day the most effective of all arguments in proof of the divine character of Christ and Christianity—the argument from visible results—is that contained in the reply which Christ made to this discouraged and doubting but altogether faithful disciple imprisoned in the dungeon of Machærus, awaiting his early execution. That reply served as a holy baptism and divine anointing for the ordeal that awaited him; and it serves to show us that the way to answer all questions, from whatsoever source they may come, as to whether or not Christianity is divine, is to point—is to be sure that we are able to point—to moral and spiritual results in the lives of men and nations accomplished by its divine transforming power.

And so it sometimes occurs in the experiences of God's children that they are surrounded by circumstances that seem to them for the time being to be irreconcilable with the overruling providence of an all-wise and an all-good God. They are thrown into a questioning state of mind. It is usually trials, misfortunes, sorrows, afflictions, death of loved ones under circumstances peculiarly trying, that plunge the despondent believer into this species of scepticism. The destruction of property and life by fire and flood and earthquake, the sufferings of the innocent caused by disease and pestilence and poverty and war and inheritance—how can God be good, and allow such things? While this doubt may prove that one's faith is not all that it ought to be, it does not necessarily prove that he who has it does not believe in and love the Lord Jesus Christ. I have known good people to get into such a state. It is a period rather than a state. It does not last long. The clouds roll away, and the doubting and despondent believer

not only sees the sun again, but as he looks upon the receding clouds, he sees them lighted up with brightness and glory from above. Faith, if thrown out of its equipoise, soon reacts and reasserts itself. Such scepticism I know is inconsistent with the highest ideal of Christian faith; but it is nevertheless true that such experiences do sometimes occur in the lives of sincere and faithful followers of Jesus Christ, and they are often among the most useful members of the Church. Such perplexed believers need guidance, not criticism or condemnation.

### *3. Scepticism in Developing Youth not an Abnormal Experience*

Again, there is a scepticism that pertains peculiarly to youth, to youth as it is turning into manhood. Is there not a sceptical period through which every thoughtful young Christian, more or less, must pass before he settles down into the mature faith of manhood? Not every one, indeed, but certainly many do pass through just such a period. This scepticism marks the transition period between the immature faith of youth and the mature faith of manhood. A youth often forms crude and childish ideas of God, of heaven, of the soul, of the Bible, of all spiritual doctrines and things. These crude ideas must be abandoned and give place to more intelligent and correct ideas of spiritual things. The young Christian, in giving up his early formed ideas of spiritual things, is very apt to feel or to fear that he is giving up his faith in these things themselves. Not so—certainly not necessarily so. This test of the faith, if met thoughtfully and passed successfully, makes one a stronger and more intelligent believer than was possible before. It oftentimes drives the thoughtful young man, while his faith is thus unsettled and he is at unrest, to earnest study and careful examination of the evidences of his faith, and as a result he is able to give thereafter an intelligent reason for the hope and the faith that is in him. If the scepticism of young manhood accomplishes this result, it is not an evil in one's life. Under religious instruction in the nursery, at home and at Sunday School, a Christian youth grows up into a religious faith without much thinking for himself. The time

comes when this intellectual and religious creed of youth must be recast. This questioning or sceptical period of young manhood seems to be the occasion for doing this. His idea of God changes, but it is for the better and higher and truer.

This is not only an important but a critical period in a young Christian's life. For one may come out of this unsettled state not only into a stronger and more rational faith, but, unfortunately, if the other alternative be chosen, into a state of agnosticism or infidelity. The influences that are around a young man at this critical time—his companions, his spiritual advisers, the books he reads—have much to do with determining in which of these two ways he will come out of his scepticism. If he has positively Christian companions, if he is fortunate enough to find sympathetic spiritual advisers who can explain his state of mind to him and lead him out of it, and if good books fall into his hands and occupy his thoughts, nothing is to be feared as to the results. But if, on the other hand, his companions are irreligious scoffers and confirmed sceptics, if he has no wise and sympathetic counsellor from whom to seek advice, if books fall into his hands that minister to doubt and not to faith, then he is almost certain to come out a confirmed sceptic or a positive disbeliever in Christianity. Such a deplorable turn many young men do unfortunately often take. One of the most earnest and Christian young men of my acquaintance years ago, one who had the Christian ministry in view, became sceptical when about twenty-one years of age. Just at this critical time he began reading the writings of Matthew Arnold, John Stuart Mill, Professor Huxley, and the like—all of them books of a high intellectual order that might be read with profit at some time, but not books suited to his mental and religious needs at this particular time. It was not long before he decided not to preach, and later he abandoned all faith in the Christian religion in so far as it claims to have a divine founder and supernatural accompaniments.

"Nearly every young man in civilised lands," says Professor Townsend of Boston University, "has his period of doubt. I passed through my period of personal scepticism while at col-

lege. The experience was intense, lasting perhaps two years. A few sensible remarks from Dr. Lord, president of the college, suggesting that Christianity is a system which, to a certain extent, can be tested as other matters are tested, furnished a key that subsequently opened the door leading back to the faith of early boyhood."

#### 4. *The Agnosticism of Faith*

And there are some forms of agnosticism that are expressions more of Christian faith than of sinful disbelieving doubt—so writes Bishop McConnell:—

"Some who think of themselves as agnostics are not really so. The Christian minister, in dealing with doubters, should proceed very carefully. It may be that the man who is outside the organisational fellowship because he doubts is a more intelligent, or more reverent, or more believing disciple than some who are within. Some within may not question because they may not be over-supplied with the instruments for questioning. There is a sphere in Christian experience for legitimate suspension of judgment. The simple recognition of this will keep some from leaving the Church because of supposed agnosticism, and will certainly aid in correcting the misapprehensions of those who resent this or that claim of the believers to knowledge to which no one may be able to show title. There is a place in the Christian community for a spirit of agnosticism which is at bottom faith—the faith of willingness to leave some problems unsolved, with confidence that the results can be left in the hands of the Father in heaven. If we get at the cause of agnosticism in some persons we may find it to be the reaction from too extensive claims to knowledge either on their own part or on the part of some believers with whom they have been associated. Take one theme very important to us all—the belief in immortality. Many Christian believers in immortality do not say much about their belief, and that for the reason that they do not wish to seem to assume more knowledge than they possess. They feel convinced of their essential immortality as sons of the Father, but just how to construe the conditions of eternal life they make no claim to know. They say frankly that they do not know. There

are no data upon which to frame even an opinion. All that we have is so clearly pictorial or else so utterly drawn from a world-view which has passed away, like that of Dante's or Milton's splendid imaginings, that we say that we have no knowledge whatever in the exact sense. Now this is a sincere and reverent and Christian agnosticism. It is the agnosticism of faith and not of doubt, for the believer is entirely willing to leave the outcome in divine hands. He does not profess knowledge which he does not have.”<sup>1</sup>

### 5. *When Scepticism Invades the Ministry*

And young ministers sometimes encounter periods of scepticism, especially if they never had such an experience before entering the ministry. The average young Christian grows up with the idea that the Christian religion is certainly true, and that there is no argument of any weight, or worthy of any consideration, against it. But when he begins the study of philosophy, metaphysics, science and theology, he finds that there are some real arguments on the other side. They are new to him, and while they shock him, yet they, in a certain sense, have a fascination for him. He shudders at the consequences of what opens before him as a possibility even, viz., that this and that fact or doctrine of Christianity may not be true after all; and if they are not true, does not the whole system of Christian Revelation likewise fall through with them? He is disturbed at his thoughts and is made very unhappy. Now it is the privilege of every Christian to have the witness in himself so clearly revealed and to enjoy so fully the assurance of the faith that he will be in no way disturbed at the discovery of some arguments against the existence of a God and against the divine character of Christianity of which he had no knowledge before. But not every young Christian, not every young minister, lives up to this high privilege as he ought, and there are times when even with the best of men the tides of faith run low and the psychological conditions are conducive to doubt. The faith of a believer is greatly in need of spiritual reinforcement at

<sup>1</sup> “Personal Christianity,” pp. 129-131.

such times. Happy are they who, when their faith is thus sorely tried, know like John the Baptist where to go for reassurance and comfort. One needs at such a time to study afresh the works and influence of Christianity in the world to be reconvincing of its divine character. If such an experience leads the young minister to an examination of the foundations of his faith—and if this examination fills his mind as never before with the truth and force of all those great evidences in proof of the divine origin and character of Christianity that have been called forth by the opposing arguments of the unbelieving world—if this be the outcome of his experience, as it often happily is, then he will be a better and stronger Christian and a more efficient minister of the gospel for having passed through such an experience with distressing doubts.

An eminent and useful missionary to India was much troubled in his young manhood with religious doubts. But in the midst of his doubts he yet, strangely enough, felt the call of duty to go as a missionary to India and work for the salvation of the heathen. He went. Years later he returned to America on a visit, his labours in the meantime having been crowned with abundant success. Some one who had known of his early spiritual troubles chanced to meet him one day and asked him how he had settled his religious doubts. "I went earnestly to work for Christ," said he, "and I have been so busy trying to save the poor heathen among whom I have been labouring for the past several years, that I have not had time to think of my doubts. I never did answer my difficulties and questions. But they ceased to trouble me when I became busy in the Master's work, and I would not waste the time now that it would take to have them explained." There are doubts born of having nothing to do, and the only way to cure them is to go to work for Christ. Christians that are busy in the Lord's work, in helping the poor, in seeking and saving the lost, are rarely, if ever, troubled with doubts. They need God in their work, and they find that those for whom and with whom they work also need him, and this deeply felt need of God makes it easy to believe that One so greatly needed must surely exist and be available for men's needs.

## III

## THE REINFORCEMENT OF FAITH

I. *The Effects of Christianity in the World*

It is to be desired that every Christian's religious experience should be so deep and his relations to Christ so close that he will not need rational and theological arguments to sustain his faith when circumstances arise which might tend to produce a state of scepticism. But, if a Christian ever finds himself in a moment of misfortune and weakness calling in question the divine character of Christianity, he needs only to do what Christ bade the disciples of John to do—consider the works of Christ and Christianity through all the ages which have reproduced in a spiritual way and in varying degrees the works which Christ performed in the presence of John's disciples. They are the vindication of its divine claims and the unanswerable argument in proof of its divine origin and character. It will not be perhaps an exaggeration to say that the noblest deeds of human history since the Christian era began and all the richest blessings of our civilisation we owe to Christianity. Christianity asks no surer vindication of its divine claims than that it be studied and judged in the light of what it has done for the human race.

Christ often appealed to his works as the proof of his divine character. And so there is no plainer or stronger or more satisfactory argument for our day in favour of the divine origin and nature of Christianity than to appeal to its influence and work in the world, whether upon nations, or communities, or individuals. What has been the effect of Christianity upon the nations that have come under its influence? Take Great Britain, for example, whose inhabitants were, before the entrance of Christianity, as thoroughly heathen people as are those of China and India to-day. What has wrought this change? When Queen Victoria was asked by the Japanese ambassador as to what was the secret of England's greatness, she replied, pointing to an open Bible: "That is the secret of England's greatness." What is the effect of

the Christian religion upon a community that comes under its influence? Take, for example, such a notoriously wicked and lawless entrenchment of vice as "Five Points" in the city of New York. For many long years it defied the law, and so strongly was crime entrenched there that even policemen feared to go there. It continued such until the Christian missionaries began their work among the law-breakers and criminals there. But through the influence of the Christian religion it was transformed into one of the most law-abiding and moral sections of the great city. How account for the transformations in moral character accomplished in the thousands of individuals in almost every community on any other hypothesis than the divine character of Christianity? Never mind about inconsistent professors of religion and the failure of so-called Christian nations to practise high standards of ethics in their dealings with other nations—Christianity is in no way responsible for their failures, but condemns them as strongly as do the critics of Christianity. Judge Christianity by those who do what it bids them do, not by those who fail to do what it bids them do. For a man or a nation to be called "Christian" does not make them such. The greatest and best men that have ever lived have been believers in and worshippers of God and for nearly two thousand years past they have been believers in and followers of God incarnate in Christ, and have ascribed the good that was in them to the Founder of the Christian religion. "A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit."

## *2. The Cause and Cure of Doubt*

We thus see that the cure of doubt and agnosticism is not by the method of Christian mysticism and subjective experience alone; better still, at least as the cure for some forms of doubt, is the pragmatic proof of faith by its personal and practical results. The highest and most convincing proofs of Christianity lie peculiarly in the field of moral test. There is no path to the discovery of specifically Christian truth but by moral venture in the realm both of believing and doing. The results, when seen in the inner as well as the outer life of the

whole man, constitute at once the most characteristically Christian answer to agnosticism and the most convincing witness to the reality and value of Christian faith. In the volume of Cole Lectures already quoted from Bishop McConnell utters words concerning the cause and cure of doubt so true and wise that we do well to reproduce them here:

"The best reply to the doubter is the presence not so much of beliefs as of believing persons. Agnosticism should be met by Christian daring. The venturesomeness of faith, especially when it leads to expanding and improving life, is the reply to the doubts of the times. The theoretical objections to the possibility of walking are solved by walking. The objections to belief are solved by believing. The believers who attain to life by their belief are the actual facts that make doubts difficult. If Christianity ever loses this quality of magnificent daring it will cease to be the Christianity of Christ. The belief in God, the belief in men, the belief in the possibility of filling the whole world of men with the spirit of Jesus—these are the bold ventures which show forth the daring of Christianity. Hope grows by its own exercise. The persons actually at work at the relief of world-wide heathenism or at the redemption of cities and nations from civic evils do not seem easily discouraged.

"Some storm-battered intellects, having made the rounds from common sense to materialism and then by reaction to idealism, find themselves at the end in agnosticism. Others arrive at agnosticism by a different route. Agnosticism is with some just intellectual weakness or weariness. The mind is tired out so that it cannot believe. In confronting such agnosticism the Christian leader will attempt to tone up the whole life. A distinguished scientist used to say that he always felt a tendency to agnosticism when the currents of his life began to run low, and that he would find his way out by reading the greater poets, or by listening to the hymns of the faith, or by reaching out for closer fellowship with dear friends. Some agnosticism is the outcome of spiritual starvation, though we use the terms without reflection upon the character of the agnostics themselves. They may not be to blame for the dwarfing experiences through which they have passed. But in helping such impoverished souls the soundness of life in the

Church itself should be an aid. The whole life of the Church ought to be so quick and stirring as to arouse life in others. The positive note should be ever ringing. The students of Christian thought in recent years have done much for us in demonstrating that the experiences on which Christian opinion depends rise and fall with the rise and fall of the vitality of the inner man; hence the more reason why everything about a Church should suggest vigour. This can only mean in the last analysis, of course, the vigour of the persons who compose the Church."

### *3. The Heroism and Victory of Faith*

Heroism is something more than daring. Daring may, and often does, act without reason. The "dare-devil" is one who throws reason to the wind. Heroism is not only calmly courageous but is reasonable in what it dares to believe and do. "Thomas Carlyle," says an English author in a recently published volume, "was never tired of repeating that the ultimate question which every man has to face and answer for himself is this: Wilt thou be a hero or a coward? No philosopher can relieve us from the responsibility of having to make that choice."

"Religion has sometimes been represented as introducing a new faculty called 'faith' into the man's life, as adding this faith to the reason he had before, or perhaps as driving reason out and putting faith in its place. This is a misconception. Faith is neither a substitute for reason nor an addition to it. Faith is nothing else than reason grown courageous—reason raised to its highest power, expanded to its widest vision. Its advent marks the point where the hero within the man is getting the better of the coward, where safety as the prime object of life is losing its charm and another Object, hazardous but beautiful, dimly seen but deeply loved, has begun to tempt the awakened soul. It is to the heroic spirit, waiting in all of us for the Divine summons which shall call it from death to life, that the figure of Christ, dominating the ages, makes its great appeal."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> L. P. Jacks, "Religious Perplexities."

John Randolph of Roanoke is said to have filled his copy of the "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," on his first reading, with annotations on the margin, approving the deistical notions of Gibbon. Most of these notes he obliterated in after life. The following is what he wrote on the margin of the celebrated fifteenth chapter, when, later in life, he reread the book:

"When the pencilled notes to this and the succeeding chapter were written the writer was an unhappy young man deluded by the sophisms of infidelity. Gibbon seemed to rivet what Hume, and Hobbes, and Bolingbroke, and Voltaire, etc., had made fast, and Satan—the evil principle in our (fallen) nature—had cherished; but, praised be his holy name, God sent straight to his heart the sense of sin and the arrow of the angel of death, 'unless ye repent,' and with it came the desire of belief; but the hard heart of unbelief withstood a long time, and fear came upon him and waxed great, and brought first resignation to his will, and after much refractoriness (God be praised, but never sufficiently, that he bore with the frowardness of the child of sin, whose wages is death), God in his good time sent the pardon and peace which passeth knowledge in the love which struck out fear."

William E. Gladstone, the eminent English statesman, once said that of the fifty-five truly great men whom he had personally known in life all but three were devout believers in God, and nearly all of them believers in the divine-human Christ as God incarnate. If the fruits of theistic and Christian faith as seen in human character be compared with the fruits of infidelity and atheism, one can but feel that even if it were a delusion to believe in the existence of God and in the incarnation of Christ, it would be better to cherish a delusion so beneficent and potent for human good than to believe that there is no God and that Christ was in no sense superhuman.

"According to your faith, so be it unto you" is a statement which means that faith is the measure of the man. A man without a faith is a man without character. A man with a bad faith is a bad man in life, character, and influence. A

man with a timid, weak, wavering half-faith is a weakling among men, tossed about with every wind of doctrine. Faith in error leads to an erroneous life; faith in truth, to a true life; faith in virtue, to a holy life; faith in Christ and immortality, to a Christian life, to life eternal. It is this vital and causal relation which faith sustains to life and character that gives it its great importance in the Christian system.

Every man who has a conscious and well defined faith makes, not for others but for himself, an individual and personal creed; and the value of this personal creed to his character and life cannot be easily exaggerated. This invaluable creed must not be confused with the historic church creeds which, written centuries ago, are in our day subjected to much and severe criticism. To possess authority, some one has said, a man must have a clearly defined creed. He must know what he believes, and believe it with his whole soul. His Christian feeling may be broad in its sympathies and free from bigotry, but his doctrine must be a clear, deep stream flowing between its solid banks, else it will become a swamp or a morass. The expansive lake avails nothing to generate electric power; but how different when its water flows through the close and rock-ribbed banks of Niagara!

"He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." The fact here stated appears so self-evident that we wonder why the inspired writer should have thought it necessary to state it. Of course a man who comes to God is going to believe "that he is," or he would never come; nor is it at all likely that any man would seek God unless he also believed beforehand that he would reward his search. Why was it thought necessary to state a truth so self-evident? It was to teach us that every one who comes to God should not merely "assume" and "take for granted" the existence of God, but he must have a profound conviction and deep realisation of its truth and its moral significance. The first step, therefore, in explaining the divine plan of salvation and in guiding aright seekers after God is to so quicken into life their thoughts concerning the divine

Being that they shall not merely assume and assent to, but intensely believe in, the reality of the Divine existence and the fidelity of the Divine character.

Faith, rightly defined, is the foundation of character, and right-doing is the result of right-thinking and right-believing. The man who does not believe in the Bible, in God, in Jesus Christ, in the divine authority of the moral law, in rewards and punishments in a future life—it is utterly impossible that he should be in conduct and character what that man will be who believes in all these things. The great and saintly men of the earth have all been great believers, and their moral greatness is directly traceable to their faith. It was the great faith of Abraham that made him the father of the faithful for all time and the founder of a race the most noted for its moral character and achievements of all the ancient nations. It was the faith of Joseph that made him choose purity and a dungeon rather than guilt and freedom, and that made his name an undying synonym of innocence and virtue. It was the faith of Moses that was the secret of his life work and character, that made him the deliverer of his race and the legislator of the nations. It was the faith of Daniel that placed his name foremost among idealised men of courage and fidelity. It was the faith of Paul that inspired his life work and made him the grandest missionary that ever carried the gospel to the nations of the earth. It was the faith of "the fishermen of Galilee" that made them "turn the world upside down." It was the faith and zeal of John Wesley that made him to be not only one of the humblest of disciples but the most influential religious leader of modern times, and enabled him, amid criticisms and oppositions, to inaugurate a work that to-day seems destined to envelop the whole earth with its doctrines of free grace, free will and full salvation. The inspiration of every great man's work is his faith.

Martin Luther said that in his day, because of the insistence of the priests on the observance of the fast days of the Church, the people had come to believe that it was "a greater sin to eat butter on a fast day than to lie, or to swear, or even to commit adultery." The young monk of Erfurt was one of those

brave, believing souls that dared to doubt; and in so doing he became the forerunner of Protestantism and the first interpreter of its faith; and we can but think that other monasteries also have harboured monks like himself in all things, except that they did not, like him, dare to give outward expression to their doubts. I love to look at the statue of Martin Luther and think of the young monk that dared to nail those anti-papal theses on the Church door at Wittenburg and to go, when duty called, to the Diet at Worms though it should rain down devils as thick as the tiles upon the housetop! And I love to recall, as I look, the splendid tribute of Marianne Hearn, the English poetess, to this great German leader—to whose Christian ideals if the German people had but been true, the world-war would never have been fought:—

That which he knew he uttered;  
Conviction made him strong,  
And with undaunted courage  
He faced and fought the wrong:  
No power on earth could silence him  
Whom faith in truth made brave;  
And, though four hundred years have gone,  
Men strow with flowers his grave.

It puts granite in the grain and iron in the blood even to go to the grave, or look at the cold marble statue, of a man like that. It seems to speak and say, "Don't be afraid to doubt, and, if need be, to stand alone for what you believe to be true and right." It was not, however, in doubting, but in believing that Luther found for himself and others the pathway to peace and to power. Of this pathway doubt may be the beginning, but it is not the end. It is not doubt, but faith that alone can "laugh at impossibilities, and cry, it shall be done!" It is the man who believes, who knows what he believes, who has conscientious convictions and the courage of his convictions, to whom we are to look for great achievements. Daring to doubt is good, but daring to believe is better. And faith means God, and a great faith means a great God.

The "Heathen sojourning in Galilee, A.D. 32," described in

the oft-quoted words of Richard Watson Gilder, may have had to stop with an "If," but no one who rightly appraises the arguments and evidences that prove Christ to be the Author of the Christian religion is thus left in doubt as to its truth.

"If Jesus Christ is a man—  
And only a man—I say  
That of all mankind I cleave to Him,  
And to Him will I cleave alway.

If Jesus Christ is a God—  
And the only God—I swear  
I will follow Him through heaven and hell,  
The earth, the sea and the air."

Bishop W. A. Candler's volume titled "Christus Auctor," after presenting in strong array the great arguments in proof of the divine character of the Christian religion, concludes with words like these:

"Let us then dismiss our doubts and fears. We have found the truth; let us now accept it unfalteringly. We have not made this search for the pleasure of a mere excursion. Sincere and serious minds cannot seek truth in that spirit. The quest for truth is not the cruise of a pleasure boat but the voyage of a merchantman seeking goodly pearls until one be found worth all the world beside. It is just such a treasure that we have found in Him 'in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.' He who came unto the world to bear witness to the truth has given us the Living Truth. His words are final. 'Christ no after age shall e'er outgrow.' In him we discover that the heart of the universe is not inflexible Power but redeeming Love. Here we may rest secure and confident."

CHAPTER NINETEEN  
THROUGH EXPERIENCE TO GOD



## CHAPTER NINETEEN

### THROUGH EXPERIENCE TO GOD

The only knowledge of God that is saving and satisfying is that obtained in and through a personal experience. The intellectual experience of God finds expression in faith and creeds; a heart experience of God expresses itself in love and other emotions; a volitional experience of God expresses itself in obedience and deeds. To know God by experience involves all of these. Religious experience is, therefore, fundamental and comprehensive. He who, travelling any one of the many different paths that lead to God, finds him, believes him, loves him and obeys him has such an experimental knowledge of him as makes him in the deepest and truest sense a child of God.

#### I

### THE NATURE AND NEED OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

There are some facts and truths the knowledge of which is a matter simply and only of apprehension and comprehension by the intellect. There are other facts and truths a knowledge of which is attainable both by experience and by intellectual study; and in most cases where this latter double method of attaining knowledge is possible, the knowledge attained by experience is more direct and satisfying than that attained simply by intellectual study. To read what others have said in books as to the theistic conception of God may lead to a clear and full knowledge about God, and one need not believe that there is a God in order to obtain this kind of knowledge. But another student may seek and find God in a rich, full personal experience; and if so whatever knowledge he may have obtained about God by learning what others have said about him will be not only clarified and en-

riched but greatly enlarged by the experience which he has with God.

### *I. Experience Man's Best Teacher*

Experience, if not the first, is certainly man's best teacher. We are so constituted by our Creator and so related to the physical world and our fellow beings round about us, and they to us, that, in the never-ending school of experience, all things are our teachers; and the greatest of all lessons that we learn in this school of experience are those pertaining to God and our relations to him. This general relation between man and his environment, established by the Creator that in and through experience free moral beings may realise their highest and best development is one of wise beneficence; and only by recognising it and adapting themselves to it can men be happy.

In dealing with this problem, says Dr. Borden P. Bowne, we must first form a true conception of what the world is for, and its relation to man. "If the chief good in life is found in the pleasurable affections of the passive sensibility, and if the aim is to produce them and gratify them, then the world is a miserable and hopeless failure. But if the chief and lasting goods of life are those of the active nature, conscious self-development, growing self-possession, progress, conquest, the successful putting forth of energy, and the resulting sense of larger life, the matter takes on a different look. Still more is this the case if the aim of the human world is a moral development for which men themselves are to be largely responsible, working out their own salvation. In such a view the good of the world consists in furnishing the conditions of a true human development, and in the possibility of being made infinitely better."<sup>1</sup>

It will thus be seen that man's attainment of knowledge of God in and through experience is but part and parcel of a large law of life by virtue of which the Creator has made us in such a sense creatures of experience that all our best lessons are learned as pupils in this school; and it is doubtful

<sup>1</sup> "Theism," p. 275.

if we may ever be truly said to know anything, unless the knowledge attained has in some way passed through the alembic of experience. Certain it is that man's best and most satisfying knowledge of God is that which comes through experience.

We sometimes talk about religion and religious experience as consisting of so many ingredients and essentials in a manner that leads to confusion. Each ingredient is magnified and stressed in turn to such an extent that we discourage truly Christian souls by our excessive analysis of the contents of personal salvation, seeing that they are not conscious of possessing all the ingredients named. We must not forget, therefore, that, however many things enter into religious experience, personal religion itself is not a complex or a compound thing, but a unit; it is spiritual life; and repentance, faith, righteousness, sonship, holiness, love, are but so many ways in which this divinely begotten life of God in the soul manifests itself in a world of fallen but redeemed sinners. This spiritual life, possessed by every true believer, while perfect in kind, yet admits of perpetual increase, and this not only while embodied in the flesh, but doubtless forever. And inspiration has no nobler and better term with which to describe the future state of believers than this: it is life—eternal life. But not to the future state alone does this "life eternal" pertain; it is the present possession of every believer. Our Lord declared repeatedly, "He that believeth on me *hath* everlasting life"—not will have it hereafter when he dies, but has it now. To him who already has eternal life, death is but an incident along the way. St. John in closing his Gospel told us that he wrote the things therein recorded that men might believe in Christ, and that by believing they might have "life." But later, in writing his more personal message (the First Epistle), he said: "These things have I written unto you that believe . . . that ye may *know* that ye have *eternal* life." This is Inspiration's last word to the believer. The soul that has entered into fellowship with God through Jesus Christ is already in possession of the life eternal, and although his "conversation" may be on earth his real "citizenship" is in heaven.

*2. The Bible and Christian Theology as Related to Experience*

The Bible is best understood when it is read as a book of religious experience—the experience of individuals and nations in their relations to and with God. And the same is true of Christian theology, which, however closely it may be related to the past, is, if it is what it ought to be, a product and expression and interpretation of the religious experience that prevails from age to age. It should therefore be not a static but a progressive thing. A progressive Christian experience cannot fail to clarify religious thought, enlarge faith and enrich theology in many ways.

"The Bible," says Dr. John A. Rice, "is not a text-book on theology, not even a treatise on religion. It is a record of experience, the experience of the life of God in the souls of men, of men scattered over a thousand years, in some cases distanced from each other by a thousand miles; and yet they are bound together by a common spirit, a common attitude towards the fundamentals of life, a common realistic touch with God. And God always takes the initiative, always moves upon man rather than man upon him, as in all other sacred books. He is searching for men rather than men for him. . . . Is it not necessary that each generation shall rediscover and reinterpret God? . . . An enlarging conception of God requires a changing conception of the Bible. When we understand the Bible to deal with religion and our conception of religion to be subject to the changing time-spirit, we get upon a sure foundation. The changeless law of change does not involve the substance of religion, but its forms. Changing the methods by which faith thinks and works—change of faith itself indeed—is not loss of faith. The Bible becomes far more vital when thought of as the greatest of all books of religious experience."<sup>1</sup>

Nor are the following words of Dr. W. N. Clarke less forceful and true in describing the vital relation between experience and the thought and theology of both Biblical and later periods of history:

<sup>1</sup> "The Old Testament in the Life of To-day."

"The Bible itself is an expression of experience. If this experience had not continued, the Bible would have become only the record of an ancient and forgotten life, powerless to preserve Christianity in the world. The theology of any age is largely an expression of the Christian experience of that age. The general experience of any given time, with its characteristic peculiarities, grows up into a style of thinking, a moral and spiritual consciousness, from which there is no escaping. It influences the understanding of the Scriptures. It limits and modifies religious thought. Theology is formed in it as in an atmosphere. The theologies of to-day are part and product of the Christian life of to-day, the true offspring of the present Christian age. This is why they differ from previous theologies. If the theology of a time is various and changing, it is because the life of the time is various, growing, transitional. The vital Christian experience of any time is the best interpreter for that time of God and eternal life. It is the experimental nature of Christianity that makes Christian theology so fresh and living as it is. Progressive experience makes an ever-growing Church, and out of the ever-growing life of the Church comes an ever-growing theology, with the indwelling spirit of God as the guide of its progress. Theology can never stand still while the divine life of the Church is moving forward."<sup>1</sup>

So too Bishop E. D. Mouzon finds that the Bible can be best understood when it is read and interpreted as a book of experience with God. He says:

"In what we may more specifically call Christian experience, we are brought face to face with a personal God. Here lies the chief value of the Bible—it is a book of personal experience. There is possibly no better description of the Bible than this: 'It is the book of personal experience of God.' And what makes it all the more valuable is that this experience is the experience of all sorts and conditions of men stretching on back through many centuries. This is what the Epistle to the Hebrews means when it says that 'We are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses'—witnesses to the everlasting realities of religion—witnesses to the fact that man

<sup>1</sup> See "Outline of Christian Theology," pp. 18-20.

does meet God. And they are witnesses as different in type as Abraham, and Moses, and David, and Samuel, and Amos, and Hosea, and Isaiah, and John, and Paul. This indeed is what makes the Bible to be a living book. It is far more than a record of dead facts; it lives and breathes with the same experiences which we ourselves have. If what is in the Bible did not answer to what we have experienced, it would be a dead book, as meaningless as the hieroglyphics down in Mexico, the key to which no man has yet discovered. The religion of the Bible is thus the religion of personal experience, a religion in which the Personal God has personal dealings with individual men. Our God is the God not only of great nations, but of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God of individuals.”<sup>1</sup>

### *3. God's Revelation of Himself in and Through Experience*

That man stands in need of a revelation of God higher than and even more satisfactory than that which physical nature or human reason can furnish is a statement which can be proved by an appeal to the religious history of the race, and men's gropings after God. There are two ways in which God may furnish that revelation of himself of which man stands in need but cannot, by unaided reason, himself supply, namely by specific “divine acts of historic occurrence or by revelations continually repeated in men's hearts,” to use the words of Hermann Lotze. The revelations made to and through Moses and the prophets, in and through events of Divine significance in Hebrew history, and above all, in and through Jesus Christ, are examples of the former-revelations by means of “divine acts of historic occurrence.” But, however numerous and important these may be, not less important are the revelations continually repeated in men's minds and hearts and consciences. These latter revelations are not only to, but in and through the minds and hearts and consciences of men; and men are both receivers and interpreters of these revelations. And the personal equation will have to be continually taken into consideration in that men's capacities both as receivers

<sup>1</sup> “Does God Care?” pp. 28-29.

and as interpreters differ greatly among themselves. So that what men have in the last analysis to go upon, and to go by, is not a divinely given and infallibly interpreted revelation of God and his will; but the interpretations which they, as good and honest but fallible men, make of the revelations which they receive from God. We are always under the necessity therefore of "trying the spirits" that we may be sure as to what is certainly from God.

And yet in spite of the fact that this element of fallibility, this possibility of misinterpretation always attends these continually repeated "revelations" made by God to and in and through the minds and hearts and consciences of men, they are just as vital to faith in God and just as necessary to a religious experience and to godly living as are the revelations in "divine acts of historic occurrence." It is, we repeat, through experience alone that men can really know God; and the revelation that creates a vital and enriching religious experience and makes God real is not so much the revelation which God made to some man in the past and which was recorded in the Bible as that other revelation that is being continually made in the heart which makes of the man who receives it a living epistle that may be known and read of all men.

Hermann Lotze speaks of "upward-soaring trains of thought about God which reason can begin but is unable to bring to an end in a satisfying and convincing conclusion until they have been reinforced by those continually repeated revelations in the heart" of which mention was made above. These are wise and true words that find their verification only in a genuine religious experience:

"We can hardly picture to ourselves the workings of God upon the heart otherwise than after this pattern: we cannot imagine the recognition of any fact as something that can be simply communicated, something that reaches the mind ready made and without any activity on its part, we can only imagine that occasion can be given to the mind to, as it were, produce such recognition by exercising this activity, and in this it is that every appropriation of a truth must consist."

All of which means that man's knowledge of God—that knowledge of him that gives peace to the spirit and power to the soul—cannot be passed over in "blocks of revelation," or in cut and dried creeds, from one man to another, even from a Moses or an Isaiah or a St. John, but must be gotten in the school of experience, through penitence and prayer, through faith and forgiveness, through service and suffering, through self-sacrifice and sanctification of the spirit. He who learns what God is like in this school of experience, who obtains and retains an experimental knowledge of God, has a moral dynamic in his life equal to all demands that may be made upon it either from within or from without.

#### 4. *The Dark Pathway of Sin—Forces That Drive Rather Than Draw Men to God*

Along most pathways which men travel they are drawn to God; but there is one pathway along which men travel to God only as they are driven—that is, the pathway of sin. A guilty conscience drives one either away from God or in penitence to God. Conviction of sin is an experience that brings three things together; a man, a sense of guilt for sin committed, and God. These three cannot abide together. A man in the presence of God, conscious of his sin, can only find peace by departing from God or departing from sin. "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord," is the first instinctive prayer of a soul newly awakened to a sense of sin, as he stands in the conscious presence of the holy God. Said certain ones of old, pricked in their hearts by sin, "Men and brethren what shall we do?" Saul of Tarsus, finding it too hard longer to kick against the pricks, trembling and astonished, cried out, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" And he, having found the way for himself out of sin to God, was prepared to tell others what to do; and so we find the Philippian jailer coming to him and falling down trembling and giving vent to his distress of soul by eagerly asking, "Sir, what must I do to be saved?" The same incompatibility between the conscience of sin and the conscious presence of the Holy God had been discovered

long before Paul's day by Isaiah: "Then said I, woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips . . . for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar; and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin is purged."

As we thus study sin in the laboratory of religious experience we find that the guilty sinner cannot endure the presence of the holy God; either the sin must be removed and purged, or the guilty sinner must withdraw from that God who is "a consuming fire." "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. vii. 24) is the exclamation of a man under conviction, groaning to be delivered. But the answer is not far off: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." If under the overpowering sense of guilt the convicted sinner is made to feel that "the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint," that "from the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores," the Spirit that thus convicts makes haste to add: "Wash ye, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; . . . Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

The natural inquiry of every truly awakened soul, conscious of the sin that separates him from God, is "What must I do to be saved?" If the answer to any question has been made plain in the New Testament, it is the answer to this question: "Repent of thy sins, and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Out of sin through penitence and pardon, through faith and sonship, into that fellowship with Christ that makes one a child of God—this is the old, time-honoured, evangelical pathway through experience to God. Will it ever be superseded? Can it ever be? Not so long as men continue to sin and to know in their inmost souls that no

being less than God can deliver them from the power and guilt of sin.<sup>1</sup>

### 5. *Religious Experience as Related to Prayer*

It is impossible for two Christian doctrines to be more vitally related to each other than the doctrine of divine Providence and the doctrine of prayer. Each implies and in a sense necessitates the other. If back of and over this world, and of our life in it, there is a Divine Being, and if he be such a One as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and such a One as "Our Father who art in heaven," abounding in love and exercising an ever watchful care over his children, as Christ revealed him, it is utterly unthinkable that those who sustain to him the relation of dependent and loved children should not think of him, love him and communicate with him in some such manner as is involved in the Christian doctrine of prayer. On the other hand if there be no God, or, if there be a God, and he be not a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God, it is utterly irrational for rational beings to pray.

Religious experience centres in prayer, the essence of which consists in the conscious communion of a finite spirit with the infinite Spirit. There can be no real religious experience without prayer. Men pray instinctively. Even atheists who profess to believe that there is no God have been known time and again to cry out to God for help in the midst of trouble and danger. And if a man believes that God is a person, possessed of all personal attributes like ourselves, and that he is the Creator and Governor of men, we cannot conceive of his being content to remain shut off from communication with him in some way—and no other way is so rational as that of prayer. But whether one is to find access to God in prayer or not, and receive answers to his prayers or not, depends largely upon a right interpretation of God and of the true nature of prayer and the answer which it is proper to expect from it. A man who so misinterprets the privilege of mak-

<sup>1</sup> See chapter on "Conviction of Sin" in the author's volume titled "Personal Salvation: Studies in Christian Doctrine Pertaining to the Spiritual Life."

ing his wants known to a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God as to fill his prayer time with petitions for material, temporal and earthly things only, whose hunger and thirst are not after righteousness and who is seeking first of all and above all material blessings rather than the kingdom of God and his righteousness—such a man will likely find no pathway to God in prayer and be utterly discouraged in failing to receive answers to his prayers. That prayer which alone has the promise of being heard and answered, on no condition save the one condition of faith, is prayer for spiritual things.

It is our privilege to take everything to God in prayer; and if we pray in faith, God will always hear us and answer according as he sees is best for us. But it is what we pray for, rather than how much we pray, that is the real test of spiritual power in one who prays, and that determines most largely whether or not it will be a prevailing prayer. It is possible for one to go often to God in prayer, to pray long and for many things, and yet be a very low type of Christian, provided the burden of his desires and prayers is for things temporal, such as health and wealth and friends and success in matters pertaining purely to this life. These things all have their place in prayer; but they are secondary and subordinate; and a prayer that is monopolised by such things to the exclusion of the moral and spiritual will likely be a prayer that asks and receives not, because, in what it omits, if not in what it contains, it asks amiss. The prayer that is a pathway to God and need never fail of a speedy answer is that of the soul that hungers and thirsts after righteousness, and the burden of which is, whatever else may or may not be included in it, for spiritual blessings, for "the kingdom of God and his righteousness."

Lecky, the eminent historian, in his history of European morals says of the early Christians: "There has probably never existed upon earth a community whose members were bound to one another by a deeper or purer affection than the Christians in the days of the persecutions." It was because they were bound to a common Lord that they were so strongly and affectionately bound to one another. As early as the second

century Justin Martyr could write and say: "For no one has shown such faith in Socrates as to die for his doctrine, but for Christ's sake, not only philosophers but also mechanics and unlearned men have suffered death. There is not a single race of men, whether barbarians or Greeks, or whatever they may be called, nomads, or vagrants, or herdsmen living in tents, among whom prayers and giving of thanks are not offered through the name of the crucified Christ."

## II

### GOD IN THE EXPERIENCE OF MEN

There are five relationships that God may sustain toward man. In one or more of the five categories of this ascending scale every man must have experience with God: God the Unknown, God the Enemy, God the Taskmaster, God the Friend, God the Father.

Not every one who comes to know God passes or needs to pass through all these stages and changes of mind and heart with reference to God. Many men do not have to begin their conscious religious experience in its relation to God so far back as the first of these stages or even in the second of the five. But if any man should pass through all of them as a conscious experience, he would illustrate perfectly what is meant by coming through experience to God. Let us consider, therefore, the significance of each of these conceptions of God or relationships to him.

#### I. *The Unknown God*

First, there is the unknown God. God may be a stranger to one's thoughts and not enter at all into one's life. A man's mind may be occupied entirely with thoughts concerning things finite and temporal, the material and the human; and although these things continually suggest to every thinking man the infinite and eternal, the spiritual and super-human, one may stop and be content with the lesser and the lower. And even if one has thus occasional thoughts concerning God—as, indeed, every one must have—his thoughts

may be so vague and hazy, so superficial and speculative, and God be so distant and undiscerned, that his life, in the mind and spirit, as in the body, is as though there were no God. To say that God is incomprehensible does not mean that he is unknowable. The finite cannot comprehend the infinite. If the infinite could be comprehended by the finite, it would prove that it was not infinite. But the finite mind of man can apprehend that which it cannot comprehend. Finite man can and does apprehend the incomprehensible God, and in so doing he attains unto a knowledge of him that is, or at least may be, accurate and true as far as it goes. Though we must leave some things pertaining to the infinite forever unknown, these metaphysical limitations apply only to the intellectual knowledge of God. They do not apply in like degree to the knowledge of God that is attained by experience, and this is particularly the kind of knowledge the lack of which makes the divine Being the unknown God in the sense in which we are using the term "knowledge." Man's first and most important duty in life—as, indeed, it is also his highest privilege—is to become acquainted with God.

## *2. God Conceived of as an Enemy*

Secondly, there is God the Enemy. One reason why many men are so slow to become acquainted with God is because they have an instinctive feeling and fear that if they get acquainted with him they will find in him one who condemns the life which they are leading. This fear is indeed well grounded if one is leading a life of self-indulgence and sin that he does not want to give up. Even to one whose thoughts of Deity are vague and superficial God is apprehended as the Holy One who will not look upon sin with any degree of allowance and is therefore regarded as one who if known would sustain the relationship of an enemy in that he must punish sin. God is indeed a punisher of sin, but this does not mean that he is the enemy of the sinner. He hates sin but loves the sinner, and the last of all relationships that he would sustain to any man is that of punisher. If one is living in enmity to God, it is because he is God's enemy rather

than because God is his enemy. He only is the enemy of another who cherishes wrong feelings toward him and sins against him. Not only is God not an enemy to men, but there is a Mediator between God and man whose one great office it is to induce men to give up their enmity toward God and the sin that causes it. Christ's coming into our world is not an expression of the hate and wrath of God toward men as his enemies but of his love and mercy; not to reconcile an angry God to men by what he should do and suffer did he come but rather, as Paul interpreted the incarnation, God became incarnate that he might in and through Christ reconcile a sinful world to himself.

### *3. God Obeyed as a Taskmaster*

Thirdly, then comes God the Taskmaster. It is better to know God as an enemy than not to know him at all. If one is living in enmity to God and in sin that portends punishment, it is best for him to know it, for knowing it does not make it so; but, on the contrary, knowing what awaits him may and should cause the sinner to give up his sin and enmity and make peace with God. If, driven by conscience and the foreboding of what awaits him, a sinner gives up his enmity and relates himself to God and begins to obey his commandments and does this, moved by fear rather than by love, God becomes to him the great Taskmaster. He looks upon God as the Lawmaker and as the Judge who interprets and the dead Sovereign Ruler who executes laws that must be obeyed. He who obeys God from a stern sense of duty only and sees in him nothing more than an Overlord makes of himself a bond servant when God invites him to be a son. Duty is always noble, but duty toward God without love is as cold as an iceberg when it ought to be warm with the heartbeat of animate life and love. And yet it is far better to serve God as a taskmaster than to see in him only an enemy to fear and, it may be, to hate. Life is indeed full of duties and tasks that have been assigned to us by our Divine Master, and unless he is to us Lord of *all* he really is not *Lord* at all. But if our life of service is lighted up as it should be with love, we cease to think of God as taskmaster, and the

joy with which we accomplish the work which he assigns us transforms our task into a lifelong labour of love.

#### 4. *God Found as a Friend*

Fourthly, God is conceived of as Friend. It is a great advance in one's experience of God when he ceases to regard him as a taskmaster and comes to look upon him as his divine Friend. And such he is most truly to every one who will allow him to be so related to him. The word "friend" gathers around itself a very different group of adjectives from those which define the taskmaster. It marked a great advance in his experience of God when a certain man of old who lived in Ur of the Chaldees came to interpret the Divine Being not only in terms of monotheism and personality but of friendship. It was because Abraham interpreted God as a Friend that he in turn became known as "the friend of God." Indeed, important and significant as is the Hebrew monotheistic conception of God, it is doubtful if Abraham had failed to see in God the great Friend and all the moral attributes implied in that term, whether or not Hebrew monotheism and the Hebrew race ever could have attained that dominant place of influence in the religious history of the ancient world which is justly accorded to them. And even now there are few higher and better things in personal religion than for a man to see in God his best and greatest Friend and cultivate within himself those spiritual qualities and moral virtues that fit him for companionship with his divine Friend. Christ uttered few words to his disciples which were more precious to them and to us than when he said, "I have called you friends"; and what better definition can there be of the Christian life than to say it is fellowship and companionship with Jesus? If God revealed himself to Abraham of old as a Friend, far more clearly and convincingly has he in these last days revealed to us in the person of Jesus Christ that he sustains this precious and intimate relationship of Friend to every human being who will permit him to do so. Indeed, it is in and through Jesus Christ alone that we can understand fully what it means to know God as a Friend.

*5. God Loved as a Father*

Fifth, God's best and truest name and relationship to man is that of Father. As compared with the conception of God as a taskmaster, to think of him as a divine Friend is a great advance toward truth and reality in the interpretation of the nature and relationship of God. And yet precious as is friendship, it is but the portico and vestibule of the home. In love's "holy of holies" is the heart of the home, and here it is we find the Father. Friends, however good and true and faithful, come and go in a sense that is not true of the Father, who abides ever in the home. To us mother is the embodiment of all that is holiest and dearest in the home. We need constantly to remember therefore that all that is dear and precious to us in motherhood is included in the Heavenly Father's character as he is revealed to us by Christ. In heaven, where they neither marry nor are given in marriage, there are no sex distinctions, and so there are none in Deity. But if we are to get into our conception of the Heavenly Father all the virtues that Christ attributes to him, we must bring together all that we know of both motherhood virtues and fatherhood virtues and incorporate them into one personality. Thus alone can we reach the length and breadth and height and depth of the Fatherhood of God. Friends are good, but friends do not make home. It takes father and mother and sons and daughters and brothers and sisters to make a home. All these precious relationships and the virtues that cement and sanctify them are included in the revelation of God as our Heavenly Father. This is the conception of God beyond which there can be nothing higher. And there is nothing higher or holier for mortal men than to possess the virtues and qualities that rightly relate them to the Heavenly Father. "To as many as receive him, to them gives he power to become the sons of God." "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God!" This is the last and highest revelation of God to man and the highest and most precious relation of man to God that can be reached by experience or even be conceived of. Happy are we that this

stopping place in the divine revelations concerning God leaves us in our Heavenly Father's hands and home.

### 6. *Making God Lovable in Human Life*

The question being asked of a group of thoughtful young people how they thought of God, the first answer given in reply was: "I think of God as the one whose business it is to punish people who do wrong. He is the great Punisher of bad boys and men." The fact that a youth should give such an answer as this to the question propounded was a severe arraignment and bill of indictment either against himself and the life he was leading or (and the fact that he was yet quite young may make this the more probable explanation) against those who had so talked to him about God as to leave uppermost in his mind the impression that God is first of all and most of all the great Punisher. An incident like this may well set all to thinking who as parents or preachers or Sunday school teachers are related to young people in a religious way and are in varying degrees responsible for their guidance in thinking about God, and responsible not only for the young but also for many grown-up people about us who, though mature in body and to some extent in mind, are in the matter of a knowledge of God immature and ignorant. If the greatest service that Christ rendered to men was so to interpret God as to make him lovable, is there any service greater than this that Christ's followers can render to their fellowmen?<sup>1</sup>

## III

### CHRIST IN THE EXPERIENCE OF MEN

After the advent of Jesus Christ, and God's revelation of himself in his divine-human Person, religious experience centres in him and becomes for us Christian experience. The moon and stars furnish light for the traveller before sunrise, but after the sunrise, it is the sun's light that the traveller rejoices in and is guided by. The stars have not ceased to be, or ceased to shine, when the sun rises. Not only are they, one

<sup>1</sup> See "Christian Advocate" (Nashville), Sept. 28, 1923.

and all, shining on just the same after sunrise as before, but in spite of the fact that the stars of heaven represent an even greater source of light than does the sun, their light is superseded, is absorbed, so to speak, in the light of the one great heavenly luminary that comes nearest to us, and so completely illuminates our world with its light that we lose sight for the time being of the more distant heavenly host. God in Christ comes so near to us, means so much to us, so completely illuminates our lives with his light and life and love, that though our experience of the infinite and eternal God is just as real and true as it ever was to any believer in God before Christ came in the flesh, it is yet a simple fact that we see God in the face of Jesus Christ, and the incarnate Christ so completely dominates our experience of God that we call it most properly Christian experience.

In Dr. T. R. Glover's volume titled "Jesus in the Experience of Men," are statements which confirm the foregoing observations as to the distinctly Christian character of all present day religious experience, at least among all those by whom Christ is known and worshipped as God incarnate:

"If the affirmation of the writer to the Hebrews is to stand, 'Jesus Christ, yesterday and to-day the same, and forever'; if the Church is to maintain that he has any permanence; we shall have to show what has been his real place in human experience, and to prove that the teaching of the Church about its Master rests not on abstract theory or mythology, but has foundations in what men have actually experienced of him. We shall have to treat such evidence as the Christian generations give us, exactly as we do all historical evidence—with the same sympathy, with the same caution, applying the same canons of judgment, using the same habits of doubt, looking in the same spirit of truthfulness for alternative explanations, careful always to limit our statements severely by our real knowledge.

"Jesus had a hold of the centrality of God in experience in a way that still surprises us. Call it genius, insight, intuition—or use the speech of the Church and say Word, Essence, *Homoousios*—the fact we are all trying to express is the intense

hold that Jesus has of the Real; he *knows*, where others are guessing, and guessing badly. . . . So far as I understand the times in which we live, religion is only possible to the modern man along the lines of Jesus Christ. For the really educated man of to-day there are no other religions. . . . It is Jesus or nobody, and we are still far from grasping the whole significance of what he has to say. God for Jesus, God in Jesus, is an unexplored treasure still; and for us, apart from Jesus, God is little better than an abstract noun. . . . In the meantime it is the experience of countless souls that where we touch Jesus we do somehow touch the real. Do we not know men and women who have been remade by Jesus Christ? In our own lives, too, we know the help that Jesus has been and is. It is our experience that we can depend upon him, that we can utilise him; and our experience is guaranteed in a measure by the similar experience of others. . . . We shall never understand the last nineteen centuries, if he and his influence are unfamiliar or unintelligible to us. We shall not have our full equipment for facing the future if so great a Force, intelligible, available and unexhausted, is left by us on one side. The progress of the Christian life is marked and measured at every stage by increasing dependence on Jesus; Christian and non-Christian, we have to explain this fact in life. We have to understand Jesus Christ, unless our universe is to be chaos."

### *1. Christ Both the Creator and the Creature of Christian Experience*

To say that Christ is the Creator and the divine source of all Christian experience is to utter a self-evident truism. After Paul became a Christian he said "for me to live is Christ." Those who are true Christians are said to be "in Christ." The real Christ of a believer is not the Christ of his creed but the Christ of his experience. If this be true then it follows not only that Christ creates our Christian experience, but it is also true, in a sense, that experience creates our Christ. A true conception of Christ is not only vitally related to a true knowledge of him—meaning by "knowledge" something that is larger and fuller than a mere "conception"—and not only is a true knowledge of him vitally related to a true ex-

perience with him; but the real and true Christ is what the real and true believer who has a real and genuine experience with Christ says that he is. Experience is a better interpreter of what Christ really is than any amount of literary and historical knowledge of him, apart from Christian experience, can possibly be.

Where does the moral soul find the moral reality for which it craves? Dr. P. T. Forsythe asks this question and answers it thus :

“Where can it find it but in God, and God’s supreme, eternal, moral action. A person can only rest in a person, a soul in a soul. Nature and soul are alike unreal till they are settled on that rock. And that rock is practically Christ; for experience it is Christ. The moral God, the real God, the sure God, the Eternal God is with us only in Christ—the Christ of my experience and of man’s. The certainty of God, the reality of him, the love in him, the holy beauty in him, communion with him, are ours only in the person of Christ. It is not at last a case of either touching God or being touched by him, but of living and habitual communion with him, not of his presence, but his fellowship.”

## *2. Christian Experience the Essence of Christianity*

While Christ was here in the flesh, mingling with men and training his apostles, his chief concern was that they should be instructed in and have a true knowledge of the Heavenly Father and be rightly related to him. Next to this he sought to give them a true knowledge of the spiritual nature of his kingdom which could be attained only through a true interpretation of his own divine-human person and by personal faith in him as the Redeemer and Saviour of the world. He manifested no concern whatever about having any written records made concerning himself and his works and discourses—which it would seem he would have done, or would have had done, or at least would have ordered to be done after he left, if the New Testament was to be so essential and vital to the faith and life of the Church as some have maintained that it is. And when he went away what was he most concerned

about? It was that he should have witnesses—and this means men with an experience and with a message—and that they should go everywhere telling what they believed because of what they had seen and heard and felt. This is what made the Christian Church—not written records, useful as they have been, but Christian experience and preaching the good news of the gospel of experience—and on this same thing the life and power and the perpetuity and growth of the Church depend to-day. And so Dr. Thomas Carter is putting the emphasis at the right place when he says:

“Christianity is not primarily a book religion. It is, first of all, a Life; and it is only because that Life was first lived that it afterwards came to be delineated—first in the minds and hearts of his early followers; then in the oral traditions as these same disciples in loving memory told and retold the old, old story to their converts and their congregations; and, finally, when the voices of those that had heard him grew fewer and fewer by the inroads that death made, this tradition was at length intrusted to frail parchment. But the original writing was on the hearts and in the lives of men. And that original text is still with us. For, in the language of him who wrote certainly the dominating portion of the New Testament, the real Christian Scripture is the truly Christian character, as it reflects the principles incorporated in and inculcated by Jesus our Master. For, says Paul to the Corinthians: ‘Ye are our epistle, . . . known and read of all.’ ”<sup>1</sup>

### 3. *Christ Alone Essential to Christian Experience*

While we claim historical trustworthiness for the New Testament, we believe that many theologians have given a place and an importance to the New Testament which belongs only to Christ and Christian experience. “We have so long associated the Christian revelation with the New Testament,” says a recent writer, “that we may almost think it was made when the New Testament was written. Not so; it was made in the person, mission, and work of Christ, and it was in the lives

<sup>1</sup> “Story of the New Testament.”

of his disciples that his revelation of God was first observed. There it lived in intense vigour, and for years it was preserved in life alone, without aid from writings. This experience would have preserved Christ's revelation to man if there had been no Bible. The value of the Scriptures in keeping the experience true is beyond all estimation: and yet to think that Christianity would necessarily have perished from the world if there had been no Scriptures is to overlook its living power as well as the teaching of its early history. Certainly, Christianity would have suffered without the Scriptures: but who, knowing what was done in the first age, dares affirm that it would have become extinct?" The ability of Christianity to produce and to preserve the experience of salvation in the hearts and lives of those who accept it is what makes it the power of God unto salvation. A living Christ and a living experience of salvation would make Christianity, whether we had any Bible or not. It is not the Bible that makes Christianity, but Christ and Christian experience.<sup>1</sup>

The man whose faith in Christianity rests primarily not on his own personal experience, but on the dogma of an infallible Bible has a book religion, and his faith is endangered whenever the absolute infallibility of this book in all its statements is seriously called in question. Such a man is much disturbed, and thinks the very life and power of Christianity are threatened, if Biblical critics seem to prove anything that does not accord with his dogma of Biblical infallibility. But the man whose faith in Christianity rests primarily upon the living, divine Christ and upon a living experience of his saving power, has a foundation to his faith which no criticism can shake, much less destroy.

<sup>1</sup> "This finds a parallel in the case of the Old Testament religion and its Bible. Great things were done by God in Israel before the Hebrew Bible came into existence. Nay, one might say that the best days of Israel were over before the sacred Book appeared; that Jehovah was more manifestly present among the chosen people when they were the people of the living Word than when they became the people of the written Book. The people of the Book were a degenerate people; the emergence of the Book was coincident with the night of legalism; and the use made of it was to a large extent idolatrous, and such as tended to hide rather than reveal God. This, however, was no fault of the Book, but was rather the fault of its readers." A. B. Bruce, "Apologetics," pp. 298, 299.

The life and power of Christianity are not staked upon the issues of modern Biblical criticism. If it could be proved that the four Gospels are not trustworthy and accurate in all their statements concerning the historical Christ, the loss of confidence in the infallibility of the record would indeed be serious, but it would not be vital and fatal. The power of the living Christ and the living experience that carries with it a knowledge of that Christ would not thereby be destroyed. We go further, and affirm that if any or all of the four Gospels could be shown by a true exegesis to attribute to Christ any thought or feeling or act that was morally wrong, we would say unhesitatingly that it is the record that is wrong and not Christ. Indeed we would be but following the example of Paul (Gal. 1:8) if we should say that even if an angel of heaven said aught against Christ we would not believe him. That is, so great is our confidence in the moral perfection and divinity of Christ, based upon our own experience of his saving power, and our knowledge of his divine work in the world, that we would be ready to pronounce even the Gospels themselves false if they should be found to attribute anything morally wrong to him.

In pursuance of this thought Dr. Newman Smyth says: "The Scripture finds both reasons for, and limitations of, its authority in the knowledge and experience which man has of Christ, and the Spirit of Christ. A Scripture which could plainly and palpably deny the Christ in the best, most developed and purest understanding of him, would thereby be judged to be unworthy of a place in a canonical Bible. . . . In other words a Scripture must be Christian in order to be accepted as canonical." And "the necessary inward judge of what is Christian," he further says, "is the common Christian consciousness, or the continuous experience and ever-renewed testimony of the Church."<sup>1</sup> In other words, it is not the Bible, important as it is and true as it is, but the living Christ and a living experience of his saving power that constitute the foundation and essence of Christianity.

<sup>1</sup> "Christian Ethics," pp. 74, 75.

4. *The Christ of History and Experience*

By far the greatest value which the New Testament possesses for the world grows out of the fact that it presents to, and preserves for, every generation the one and only trustworthy record of the life and teachings of this divine-human Person. We have claimed for these records such historical trustworthiness as characterises the writings of capable and honest men, whose one and only purpose in writing them was to set forth what they believed to be the truth. If their statements are true and their writings possessed of only general historical trustworthiness, Christ is not a mere man, but a divine Person. Those who deny his divinity can do so only by denying not only the historical trustworthiness of the records, but the trustworthiness of experience. For the Christ of present day experience and the Christ of history reinforce and confirm the trustworthiness of the New Testament records in their interpretation of him as divine, so much so that if Christ had not been already interpreted as a superhuman and divine Person, we would be forced by the facts to do so to-day in order adequately to explain his transforming influence upon individuals and his supremacy in the moral world. There are two methods, therefore, of testing whether the divine Christ of the New Testament records, or the fictitious and merely human Christ of Renan and Strauss is the real Christ—viz., the test of history and the test of experience. These two however, are in a sense one, seeing that history is nothing more nor less than the well accredited and recorded experience of past generations.

Let us consider first the Christ of history. Christ has now been at work for nineteen hundred years in the world. Do the work and influence of Christ in history, let us ask, accord best with that conception of him as a divine person which is found in the Gospels, or with that which makes him to be nothing more than an ordinary human being all of whose supernatural attributes and acts are accounted legendary and fictitious creations of the mythical imagination? We answer this question unhesitatingly by saying that it is the divine Christ

that has entered into and wrought in history. No mere human Christ, no Christ whose divinity is fictitious, could possibly have exercised the moral influence during the past nineteen centuries that Jesus Christ has exercised, and his moral influence to-day is greater than ever before. When the four Gospels, therefore, ascribe divine attributes and divine works to Christ, their representation of him is in perfect accord with his true place and influence in history. If, then, the Gospel narrative is fictitious, in so far as it ascribes divine works and attributes to Christ, and if it be true (as the legendary and mythical hypotheses claim) that the real Christ was a mere man, we have confronting us the curious fact, that the Christ of history corresponds wholly with the fictitious divine Christ and not at all with the real Christ who was a mere man. But this is only another way of saying that the living Christ of history is perpetually proving the four Gospels to be true in their ascription to his Person of divine attributes and works. On the other hand, if the position of Renan and Strauss were true, we would have to admit that the one person who is most powerful in all history and most influential for good in the world to-day is an unreal and fictitious character, who owes his lofty place in the Gospels and in history, to the legendary and mythical tendencies of overzealous Christian disciples of the second century.<sup>1</sup> Let him believe this who can!

John von Müller, the great Swiss historian, after examining the writings of seventeen hundred and thirty-three authors, in seventeen thousand folio pages, gives the following as the result of his extensive investigations in the philosophy of history: "Christ is the key to the history of the world. Not only does all harmonise with the mission of Christ; all is subordinated to it. When I saw this, it was to me as wonderful and surprising as the light which Paul saw on his way to Damascus; the fulfilment of all hopes, the completion of philosophy, the key to all the apparent contradictions in the physical

<sup>1</sup> We find it desirable to repeat here the thought of this paragraph, even though it has already been stated, as was fitting, in the chapter titled "Through Christ to God."

and moral world; here is life and immortality. I marvel not at miracles; a far greater miracle has been reserved for our times, the spectacle of the connection of all human events in the establishment and preservation of the doctrine of Christ."

But Christ is not only the Christ of history who has been at work for centuries past; he is a present living Christ who is at work in the hearts and lives of multiplied millions now living. And what we have just said proves that what we have here called the Christ of history is but Christ in the experience of past generations. If it had not been that he has entered into and been a part of the lives of men, there would have been no Christian history with records for us to read to-day. But coming to our day, we ask: Is Christ's influence in the realm of personal experience that of a mere man, and that man a creation of the legendary and mythical imagination, or is it the work of a divine Christ? What says the inner consciousness of those who have experienced his saving power? The universal consensus of opinion on the part of those who have an experience and a Christian consciousness to appeal to is that the Christ in whom and by whom they have been made new creatures is divine. It is impossible to convince them that the Christ whose saving power they have experienced and who is enthroned in their hearts is nothing more than a creation of the religious fancy of men during an age of legends and myths. And if we turn our eyes away from ourselves and look at the work Christ is now doing upon the hearts and lives of others, we cannot fail to see moral results in the transformation of individual character, and in whole communities and nations, which justify the conclusion that he who is working these results before our eyes is not a mere creation of the fancy and superstition of men, an imaginary Christ portrayed in legendary literature, but a divine and living Christ, whose character accords perfectly with that set forth in the New Testament. Thus both history and experience confirm the truth of the New Testament in so far as it represents Christ as being a Divine Person.

## IV

## THE RESULTS OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

There has been no phase of religious and theological literature which in the last quarter of a century has received more notable development than the psychology of religion, and it is in the realm of religious experience that this study has been most notably enriched. The volume by Professor William James of Harvard University titled "Varieties of Religious Experience" was an epoch-making book in that it gave such a recognition of religious experience as one of the real and altogether normal facts of human beings as it had never had before at the hands of psychologists, philosophers and scientists. The Ritschlian Theology of Germany and the Pragmatism of the New England philosophers though approaching the subject from different angles were in entire accord in the emphasis which they have given to religious experience in their study alike of religion, of man and of God. The evidential value of religious experience has not only been recognised but emphasised in recent years by numerous writers as among the strongest credentials of the Christian religion, and not without a certain value among all religions as proving that the universal hunger for God is normal and has found legitimate though wholly inadequate expression in the various religions of mankind.

It is inevitable that the final verdict of men as to the truth and value of religion, and respectively of the various religions, will be determined by experience. But it is of the utmost importance that this test be fairly applied. An individual who finds his religious experience unsatisfactory—who finds his experience with God and with Christ not only unconvincing but wholly disappointing—should be sure ere he brings an indictment against God and religion, that the explanation and cause of the unsatisfactory results are not in himself and his own failure to meet the reasonable conditions involved. How superficial was the weighing of facts and evidence on the part of those who, in discussing the responsible causes of

the late World War, said that it was brought about by the Christian religion—and this, it was averred, was true because the nations that waged the war were, on both sides, "Christian nations." The Christian religion, therefore, has been tried by experience and found wanting!—so they argued. How much more truly did they speak who said that it was because the nations that were morally responsible for this war, even though they were called Christian, were acting wholly contrary to the teaching of Christianity in whatever they did to bring on the war. They only who truly follow the teaching of Christianity are putting it to the test of experience, and by them only can Christianity be fairly judged.

### *I. The God of Nature and the God of Grace Are One in Experience*

He who has come to know God by experience should find him everywhere. Especially is it good for one to learn that the God of nature and of grace are one and the same God. When a state of nature and a state of grace are distinguished from each other after the manner of the older theologians, the former is meant to describe a state of sin and the latter a state of personal salvation which has been attained through faith in Jesus Christ as a personal Saviour, accompanied by an experience of his pardoning power in the forgiveness of sin. That we can enter into such an experience only through Christ as the door of salvation is true, but this does not mean that we cannot also seek and find in communion with nature the God who pardons sin. If in communion with nature we find God, he is not a different but the same God whom Christ reveals to us. That the presence and power of God may be revealed to us in and through nature just as truly as in and through an experience of divine grace, may be shown by an incident narrated by Dr. R. W. Dale in his little volume titled "Christian Doctrine":

"I was living in a small town in one of the Southern counties of England," said a friend of Dr. Dale to him once, "and one Sunday afternoon I went out into the country for a

stroll. It was summer, and after walking for a few miles I lay down on the side of a hill. I saw, stretching to the distant horizon, meadows and orchards and cornfields; the cloudless skies were gloriously blue, and the sun was flooding earth and heaven with splendour. The wonderful beauty filled me with awe and delight. And then suddenly, through all that I saw, there came the very glory of God. I knew that he was there. His presence, his power, and his goodness took possession of me and held me." "Before that great experience," Dr. Dale observes, "my friend might have said, 'I *believe* that God is'; but afterwards he could say, 'I *know* that God is.'" God came to him in the loveliness of that summer afternoon, Dr. Dale explains, not as an inference of reason, but as an object of conscious knowledge, made certain by experience. This experience has been the experience of multitudes of men. Within and behind all visible and transitory things they have discovered, they have felt the power of an unseen and eternal Presence. They can give no account of how they became conscious that the august Presence was there, but they knew it. We are so made, and the universe is so made—and there are such relations between ourselves on the one hand and heaven and earth on the other—that we *see* mountains and rivers and woods and cornfields and clouds and sky and ocean and sun and stars; we are sure that they are *there*. How we see all these wonders, we cannot tell; but we see them. And there are such relations between ourselves on the one hand and God on the other that in hours of vision we discover behind and within the greatness and glory of the material universe a diviner greatness and a diviner glory. How the discovery is made, we cannot tell; but its reality is absolutely certain. We are in the immediate presence of the Eternal. Our faith stands "not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."

## 2. *Religious Experience a Solvent of Religious Perplexities and Bond of Unity*

Man's desire to know the truth about God and his relation to him is, more than anything else, the driving force that makes for moral progress among men. There are no "cut and dried answers" that have been prepared by God or man which can be furnished to inquiring souls with the sure guarantee that

they will answer all questions. Only he can hope to find a satisfactory answer for religious questions and perplexities who thinks things through for himself and is willing to be a learner in the school of experience. It is true, the Churches have prepared ready-made answers in the form of creeds, but ready-made solutions as a rule satisfy none but "standardised minds"; and it is doubtful if "standardised minds" make a type of believer as good and true and strong as those who, in order to find satisfaction, have to think things through for themselves. "Prepared breakfast foods" will be helps or hindrances to health of body and mind only in proportion as they may be digested and assimilated; for it is not what or how much one eats, but what and how much he digests, that is the measure of his strength.

But one does not wait until he understands all about foods and their digestible and strengthening qualities before he begins to eat and to grow. He takes foods by faith. And so it must be, within limits, in the realm of religion. It is fitting that one should enter upon the Christian life taking some things, some simple facts and truths, by faith. Faith precedes and outruns reason, and in so doing it is acting rationally and not irrationally. "Personal religion may be warm and vital before any of the great problems of religion are fully answered. The Christian faith calls upon us to establish the probabilities of its fundamentals by putting them into practice long before we can demonstrate them to our intellectual satisfaction. The Christian religion offers us a working hypothesis for life which we are asked to try out. . . . It asks us to begin with the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are under every obligation to test that hypothesis in laboratory and library; but we are asked, first of all, to test it in life, since it is first of all, a way of life. And if we can establish in this way a probability as to the reasonableness of faith, we can then proceed to test the fundamentals of that faith in every possible direction and with the least loss of warmth and vitality in our religious life."<sup>1</sup> It is for this reason that our Lord says that if any man will do his will—

<sup>1</sup> A. T. Purdy, "Pathways to God"—a free quotation.

indeed if he but wills to do his will—he shall know of the doctrine whether it be true or false.

In thinking of the difficulties both theoretical and practical in the way of faith in God one is apt to overlook the fact that there are difficulties, both theoretical and practical, equally serious, if not more serious, in believing that there is no God and in living as if there were no God. That may have been a risky experiment to make and an unusual method of solving intellectual and religious difficulties and of obtaining an experience of God, which was adopted by a "college man," an acquaintance of the author of "Pathways to God," but, as it was tried and turned out well, it is worth recording here. This college man, finding himself confronted with many intellectual difficulties in the way of believing in God, decided to stop fooling with his little doubts and face the supreme issue. He decided to live for six months as though there were no God. His was not a superficial, insincere or boastful denial with the lips, for he told no one of his determination; but he tried with the whole endeavour of a fine and honest mind to shut God out of all his life. The result was that he came out of that experience fully satisfied with his experiment in practical atheism, and fully established in his conviction of God's existence, and with a faith which could not be shaken. Not all of his intellectual difficulties were solved by the experience, but they were put in their proper perspective and found to be not incompatible with a satisfying faith in God.

The only satisfactory and final mode of ascertaining whether or not a God exists, says Dr. L. P. Jacks,<sup>1</sup> is by experiment, standing or falling by the issue, and resorting to the methods of argumentation only to confirm or elucidate the results so obtained. The experiment first, the argumentation second. He says:—

"I conceive of the experiment being made in something like the following manner:

"Of the many Gods, or conceptions of God, that are offered me, the only one I am concerned to believe in, and should

<sup>1</sup> "Religious Perplexities," pp. 55-60.

find it a calamity not to believe in, is the God who is sympathetic, and *actively* sympathetic, on the lines of my determination to achieve a better-than-what-is. Omnipotence and Omniscience I could dispense with if need be; the disappearance of the Cosmic Potentate would not leave me orphaned; the Absolute does not enthrall me and I should suffer no nightmare were I to learn that it did not exist. But were I forced to admit that the universe, as a whole, is quite indifferent to this desire of mine to achieve a better-than-what-is, that there is nothing in its nature which shares my interest in that matter, nothing there that backs me up, nothing to which the failure or success of my attempt makes the slightest difference, then indeed a dark and cruel blight would fall upon my soul.

"To that blight I may have to submit. But I will not submit until I have tested the universe in the only way that is open to me. I will trust it as a friend. There are those about me who say that my trust will not be betrayed, having made the same experiment themselves. They remind me that the world I am living in is not *any* kind of world, but just the one particular kind needed by a soul whose business it is to create new values, in the way of Truth, Beauty and Goodness. . . . I will base my life on the assumption that somewhere, in the height above or in the depth below, Power is waiting to back me up. That Power, if I find it, shall be my God.

"A person who reasons with himself in this manner is taking the most practical, and the wisest means I know of to determine the question whether God exists. For my own part I should view his experiment with hope proportioned to his sincerity. Frankly, I should expect him to make discovery of the Living God, as a reality, as a companion, as a friend. Whether to the reality, companion, friend, so discovered he gave the name 'God,' or some other name, I should not regard as a matter of supreme importance. If he chose to call it Christ, or more simply 'the Spirit,' I should not quarrel with him. The discovery is far too momentous to be imperilled for a name. Its value lies not in its name but in its *reality*. 'Few things are easier,' says John Henry Newman, 'than to use the name of God and mean nothing by it.' Call it then by a name which means something, and not by a name which means nothing."

Oneness in experience, not oneness in faith, is the bond of unity among Christians. We cannot think that the time ever will come when the knowledge and interpretations of God will be the same on the part of all men. Differences in degrees of knowledge and variations in conceiving and interpreting God will always be found among men, even among men equally intelligent and equally religious. The bond of unity in religion that can be looked for among men, and this no matter how widely they differ in knowledge, is to be found in religious experience, and this, if it be sane and normal and healthy, will show itself in readiness to co-operate with others of like mind and heart in all wise and helpful forms of Christian service. The history of religion, says Professor E. S. Ames of Chicago University, shows that, however necessary it is in religion to believe in God in some true and worthy sense and to recognise his government of the world, it is not absolutely essential to religion to have a doctrine of God that is either logically consistent or intellectually satisfactory. Fortunately our religious experience is not dependent on our theology. The branches are many, but they all find vital and essential unity in the vine. In Christ the Vine all genuine Christian experience finds its unity.

The following beautiful verses by Archbishop R. C. French make for our thoughts a natural and easy passage to the subject which we are to consider in the next chapter:

I say to thee, do thou repeat  
To the first man thou mayest meet  
In lane, highway, or open street,—

That he, and we, and all men, move  
Under a canopy of love  
As broad as the blue sky above;

That doubt and trouble, fear and pain  
And anguish, are all shadows vain,  
That death itself shall not remain;

That weary deserts we may tread,  
A dreary labyrinth may thread,  
Through dark ways underground be led,

Yet if we will our Guide obey  
The dreariest path, the darkest way  
Shall issue out in heavenly day;

And we on divers shores now cast  
Shall meet, our perilous voyage past  
All in our Father's house at last.

CHAPTER TWENTY  
THROUGH SUFFERING AND DEATH  
TO GOD



## CHAPTER TWENTY

### THROUGH SUFFERING AND DEATH TO GOD

#### I

#### THE DIVINE SIGNIFICANCE OF SUFFERING

A pathway to God which Christ has made luminous with love, and which he has made forever sacred for pilgrim feet to tread, is that which leads through sacrifice and suffering. The superficial observer at the crucifixion said that if God were Christ's Father, he would not let his divine Son suffer, but would speedily take him down from the cross. The Roman centurion took a different view of the situation. It was not until the centurion saw Christ's sufferings and death on the Cross and its accompaniments that he got a vision of God in that transaction and exclaimed, "Verily this was the Son of God!" No man ever reaches the length or breadth of his manhood, or ascends to the height of his personality until he descends to the depths of his being in suffering. A man may behold where God dwells, and see and know something of him without having suffered, but not until he gets that vision of God that comes in and through suffering, can he know God fully. It is through the smoked glass that we can best see the sun.

God is love, but not until God revealed his love in the sacrificial gift of his Son, and the Son of God revealed his love in the sufferings of the Cross, was there a revelation of the breadth and length and depth and height of the heart of God, which made it possible for us to "know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge," and to be "filled with all the fulness of God." Find the man if you can, who, in the faithful discharge of his duty, has sacrificed and suffered most for his Lord and for his fellow men, and you will likely find the man who knows most of God, and whose love for his fellow men

is most like that of Christ. It is in the school of suffering that we learn most of God. Men have argued that if God were all good and all powerful, he would not allow the innocent to suffer; and the fact that good men do suffer is interpreted by those who argue thus as proving that God is either not all-good or not all-powerful. But the facts of experience and observation prove, on the contrary, that it is those who have suffered most in the discharge of duty who as a rule believe most profoundly in both the power and love of God. It is not without profound significance that the church of the redeemed is described as they who have come up through many and great tribulations and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

### *1. Physical and Moral Evil Distinguished*

Evil that is suffered in the body or in the mind because of and resulting from its connection with the body is called physical. Moral evil is that which is done by a free agent when he acts contrary to a known moral law. A large proportion of the evils of the world involve both moral and physical elements. That natural or physical evil (poverty, sickness, suffering and the like) is one of the mightiest agencies in the hands of God for restraining and correcting moral evil, and for working out moral and spiritual good to fallen and sinful men, admits of easy demonstration. For the bringing into existence of moral free agents, that is, of creatures capable of sinning, God the Creator is wholly responsible; but for the existence of moral evil, sin, in the world, man, the moral free agent, is wholly responsible. God could prevent moral free agents who choose to sin from sinning only by uncreating them, or else by placing their wills under irresistible divine restraint and compulsion. But the latter method of controlling them would virtually destroy their real and true freedom; and if this were done, then not only all sin but all virtue and holiness as attributes of free beings would thereby be rendered impossible in men; for only such beings in a probationary state can put forth free holy volitions as can put forth free sinful volitions.

If man had never sinned, we have every reason to believe there would never have been such a large providential use of natural or physical evil as at present prevails; and this because of the fact that a sinless and holy race of beings would not have needed the presence of natural evil to secure their highest moral development. But a fallen and sinful race do need such a disciplinary agency to bring them back to God and to develop holy character and secure from them the highest moral service. It is not true that sin is now always or even generally the immediate cause of an individual's suffering physical evil, or that extraordinary suffering is a proof of extraordinary sin. "Master, who did sin," asked the disciples, "this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him" (John ix. 1-3). Human suffering is for man's spiritual good and for the Divine glory, as shown in working good out of evil —this is the explanation which the Master gives as to why natural evil is permitted or sent by God. It is not only a powerful but, in a world like ours, a necessary agency for the correction and cure of moral evil and for the spiritual development of fallen man. "Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now I observe thy word. . . . It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I may learn thy statutes" (Psalms cxix. 67, 71); "Every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit" (John xv. 2). The saintly and eminently useful men and women of history have, as a rule, had to undergo a severe discipline and to endure many and severe trials, and were made perfect only by their sufferings. It was in the experience of suffering that they came to know God more perfectly. Even the incarnate Son of God is declared to have been made perfect by suffering, and the perfection of his redeeming work was accomplished only through suffering. "I, if I be lifted up," he said, "will draw all men unto me;" and he might have added, "If I be not lifted up in suffering, I cannot draw all men unto me." Divine Providence thus turns much of the world's natural and physical evil into moral good.

Constituted as human beings are, with physico-spiritual natures, with soul and body joined in a union indissoluble while this life of probation lasts, the two natures being so related to each other that what affects the one nature affects the other also, it is impossible to detach physical suffering from the moral discipline and development of the soul that suffers. To beings so constituted the penalties for moral wrong-doing, to be most effective, will involve and must involve physical suffering. The wise parent often finds it necessary to inflict physical suffering of some kind upon a disobedient child; and civil governments have always found it necessary to enforce laws by physical punishment of some kind. The motive of the parent in administering physical punishment is wholly moral, and the end he has in view is not to inflict physical suffering for its own sake, but wholly for the moral good he hopes to accomplish in the development of character in the child. In like manner when civil governments make laws and affix physical punishment for the violation of them, the motive and the end in view can not be regarded as other than moral. God is at once our Creator and Father, and Governor. In his wisdom he has seen fit to make us not disembodied spirits like the angels, but physico-moral beings whose probation and training and moral development shall take place in an *embodied* state, with body and soul conjoined and vitally related to each other.

Men universally make a large and wide distinction between the physical and the spiritual, between the suffering of the body and the purely moral discipline of the soul, but with God it is all one—it is all moral in its motive and end. Viewed in this light the dispensation of physical suffering may be regarded as an indispensable part of God's one great, comprehensive moral government of the world. The near-sighted child, suffering for his disobedience, and the convicted criminal, suffering the penalty of the law he has violated, may each think only of the physical suffering he is undergoing, but those who made the laws they are enforcing have most in mind the moral value of the physical suffering they are inflicting. So it is with the all-wise heavenly Father and the

all-righteous Legislator, Judge and Governor of the world, who sees all things physical and moral in their entirety and unity. God has made everything for man's ultimate moral good, and physical and moral laws are so interlaced and interlocked that all things work together for moral good to them that love God and their fellow men—and all who love God and their fellow men are "the called according to his purpose."

## *2. Moral Evil as Related to God and Human Free Will*

Three of the attributes of God are of such pre-eminent importance in thinking of moral and physical evil and of God's relation to our world as its Creator and Governor—omniscience, omnipotence and goodness—that they call for special consideration by every one who seeks to explain the presence of sin and suffering in our world. God possesses full knowledge of all events, whether past, present, or to come, which knowledge makes all time an eternal now to him. His knowledge manifests its superhuman and divine quality most truly in that he foreknows how free agents in the exercise of their liberty are going to put forth their volitions. His power in like manner is without limitation; but some things are impossible even to omnipotence. Whatever is a contradiction in thought is an impossibility in execution, and it is no limitation of power in God to say that he cannot do that which involves a contradiction in thought. He cannot make a thing to be and not to be at one and the same time. He cannot make a free agent and give him a free will, with self-determining power, and, while that free agent is yet exercising his free will, compel him to will and to do that which he does not in and of himself will to do, without in so doing taking away from him his free agency and changing him from an agent into a passive tool, something that is acted upon. And it matters not whether this nullification of a free agent's free will were brought about by divine Power acting upon him *ab intra* and compelling him to will, or by acting *ab extra* and over-powering his will—the nullification of free agency would be just the same in either case.

When God, therefore, made moral free agents with self-determining power of will to do right or wrong as they should choose, he so far limited himself in that he conditioned his government of free beings on their own exercise of their free wills. Freedom to do right carries along with it necessarily freedom to do wrong. This much it is necessary to say concerning God's attribute of power, for in so doing we indicate the method that must be followed to explain the origin and continued existence of moral evil as involved in the very nature of moral free agency. Not the necessity of moral evil, but only the possibility of it is essential to free agency. For making free moral agents with the power and possibility of sinning, God is responsible; for the actuality of sin the free agent is alone responsible. The vindication of God's moral character, then, depends upon our being able to show that it is better to have a world with a race of free agents in it, even though some of them abuse their free agency and sin, than it is to have a world that should have in it no rational and moral creatures, no creatures higher than the lower animals. But every man who rejoices in the fact that he has been given existence—existence, not as a lump of clay, not as a tree of the forest, not as a beast of the field, but as a man endowed with reason and moral free agency, involving the possibility of sin with all its consequences—every such man not only vindicates the wisdom of God in what he has done in making the human race, but also vindicates his goodness, holiness and love, in spite of the fact that there is sin in the world.

It thus appears that God is not only omniscient, possessed of all knowledge, and omnipotent, possessed of all power, but he is also infinite in goodness; and this means that his providential government of the world is so executed that he does, when all things are taken into consideration, the very best that can be done even by omnipotence to promote the happiness and well being of all his creatures. And I have given this special consideration to the omniscience, omnipotence and goodness of God because of the fact that the many questions that are being raised to-day concerning the existence and character of God have been precipitated largely by the diffi-

culty many people are having in reconciling the origin and continued existence of moral evil and also of physical suffering with these three divine attributes. If God was to have the highest order of being in his created universe, there must needs be rational and moral free agents, that is, beings who could sin. But no free agent is under the necessity of sinning; if he sins, he does so freely. Man suffers physically whether he will or no; but man sins only as he wills to do so.

### 3. *Physical Evil as Related to God—the Educative and Moral Value of Suffering*

In considering the ills that flesh is heir to and the sufferings of animate caused by inanimate nature, as these ills are related to God, we do well to begin by calling attention to the fact that nature is our sternest but best teacher, and we learn from her—and in no small degree because of her very severity—more lessons than we learn from all our other teachers combined; and these lessons are none the less real and effective because we are often unconscious for the time being of the extent and value of the lessons we are learning. It is from nature and the sufferings she inflicts upon those who disregard her laws that man learns the most beneficent of all lessons—that he conquers by obedience and commands by obeying. The sufferings which nature inflicts on man educates him in humanity; and the very inhumanity of nature makes man humane. The volcano and the earthquake and the flood and the pestilence and other ills of nature, from which man suffers so often and so largely, open the floodgates of human sympathy and beneficence, and teach men, over against the selfish communism of the world which says "All thine is mine," the real and true communism of human brotherhood and Christian altruism which says "All mine is thine."

This truth has rarely been so well stated as by Dr. Fairbairn whose words will strongly reinforce what we have here said:

"The precept may be wholly moral, but the sanction, whether held to be penal, disciplinary, incidental, or vindicative, must

be largely physical. This means that the law which appears to us two-fold—as moral, a precept we can obey, a command we can resist, and as physical, a penalty or a consequence we must suffer—may appear as a unity, that is, as a law wholly moral to the Creator, who must see and read our complex life in its context, with the physical penetrating the moral, the moral affecting the physical, both reciprocally active and inter-dependent. Hence the distinction that is so obvious to us may have no being for God. Where the moral attributes are sovereign, the view of the universe will be imperatively moral; and so what we regard as physical suffering may seem to him who sees the whole as a whole altogether ethical in function and value.

"It thus appears that, however moral and physical evil, or moral and physical law, may appear to us, they stand organically related as one in the mind of him who made and who governs nature and man. Were suffering an end in itself, it would imply the ferocity of him who either allowed it to be or himself inflicted it; but were there no suffering for wrong-doing, moral evil would live a sort of unchallenged and authorised life. . . . The most remarkable thing in suffering is not its extent or duration, its intensity or immensity, but its educative, regenerative and propulsive force, its power to make man conscious of his enormous responsibilities and to awaken in him the desire to fulfil them. So conceived physical evil may be described as a divine energy for moralising man and nature. This is, if not its main function, yet its chief result."<sup>1</sup>

#### 4. *The "Acts of God" Misinterpreted*

What we now regard as false interpretations of God and divine Providence not only characterised in some respects the theology of a former generation but some of these popular theological misconceptions became imbedded in the common legal statutes of the country. We cite as an instance of this the phrase "an act of God" as it appears in law, where it always refers to some disaster or misfortune or other unavoidable ill which has befallen an individual or a community, for which no man can be held responsible and culpable. Nothing beneficent

<sup>1</sup> "Philosophy of Christian Religion," pp. 164-167.

and advantageous that happens to an individual or a community is ever referred to in the law books as "an act of God." And it is interesting to note that the reaction against this misinterpretation of God is to be seen not only among theologians and religious writers but among those who write for secular journals. This cannot perhaps be better shown than by quoting the following short paragraphs which appeared as an editorial in a recent issue of a Southern daily paper:

"The loss of the United States destroyers on the Pacific Coast is being duly investigated by the Navy Department with the indications that it will finally be charged off to profit and loss as 'an act of God.' These words have a time-honoured legal significance, and merely mean the result of the havoc of the elements or a natural catastrophe.

"They have been embalmed in judicial verbiage as expressive of calamity unavoidable by man, but their use serves as an interesting reminder of how the creature regards his Creator.

"In the development of human reverence gods were things to fear long before they were objects of love. The early sacrifices were to appease the anger of a deity whose strong hand might at any time smite an individual or a people. The good things of life, thinks Caliban, if he thinks about them at all, might just have happened. The fruit of the trees and their shade may be the result of concomitant stray chances, but if the same tree falls upon Caliban that is expressive of divine wrath.

"The technical term used by the law is a monument to how we take the good things for granted and charge our Creator with the bad. Wise old Job knew better and considered the good as well as the ill which befell him as emanating from the same source. His comforters and his foolish wife were certain that his boils were a visitation from Jehovah, no matter where his former prosperity had come from.

"Hurricanes and tidal waves, earthquakes and lightning, are classified in the law books as 'acts of God.' The shower and the zephyr, the dewfall and the sunshine are not so classified. All of which tends to show how short a time it has been since our religion, in spite of the words and life of its founder, influenced us chiefly by fear."

Quite in keeping with this are the words of a recent writer in a religious journal:

"It is a most significant change which has come over our generation, when an 'act of God,' such as has moved former generations to hopeless panic or to search for the malignities of 'divine' vengeance, prompt such meditations as those to which our philosophers and publicists and the public press are now given. Already there are very few events which catch us altogether unawares. Carelessness and disregard of the plain behests of knowledge already attained lie back of practically every calamity which befalls either the individual or society. Nature is not spleenful. She works in very orderly fashion and takes no delight in making havoc of our affairs. God is not 'out gunning' for the unwary or the wicked. Our lives are shortened for the most part by preventable disease. There are precious few 'accidents' in human experience. The slaughter wrought by automobiles is folly, sheer, almost entirely unadulterated human folly—either behind the steering wheel or before the radiator. Even earthquakes are not an 'inscrutable providence.' They have no 'meaning,' except that which all human experiences have, or are intended to have. We are finding a finer and richer divinity in human life, in the degree in which the inscrutable 'acts of God' are banished from both our legal terminology and from the organisation of personal and social life."<sup>1</sup>

##### 5. *Good and Evil as Interpreted by Optimism and Pessimism*

"This is the best of all possible worlds," said Leibnitz. "An infinite multitude of possible worlds lay before the vision of God. Evil was involved in every one which he conceived as possible, but out of all this infinitude of possibilities he selected for realisation the best possible. As absolutely good and wise he could select no other. And this world he selected, not because of its evil, but in spite of its evil, resolved to overrule the evil, which was inseparable from created being, to its greater good and his own greater glory. The only alternatives, therefore, were not between a more and a less imperfect world, but between the best possible world and no world at all.

<sup>1</sup> *The Christian Century*, Sept. 21, 1923.

If there was to be no evil, there must be no creation; if God chose to create, he had no choice but to create the metaphysically imperfect, that is, those capable of suffering and of doing evil.”<sup>1</sup>

Pessimism, on the other hand, maintains that if this is not the worst possible world, it is at least so bad that it would have been better to have had no world at all. It is something that had better never have been; and, since it cannot be mended, it ought to be ended. We cannot think of any sane, righteous and healthy-minded man as taking this view of life. “To speak of non-existence” says a thoughtful and judicious critic of pessimism, “as better than existence or to speak of the world as so bad that it had better never have been, is to say what no man of healthy mind can be got in the heart of him, or in his higher and better moments, to believe.” Of this type of philosophy the distinguished German writer, Arthur Schopenhauer, is the recognised exponent. It is much to be regretted that an intellect so able and brilliant could not have been devoted to the development of a constructive philosophy rather than one that is destructive of all that makes life worth living.<sup>2</sup>

There is an optimism which is superficial and lighthearted and unwarranted in view of the conditions that exist, or may exist, because it shuts its eyes to the immensity and intensity of the ills that are in the world and to the suffering and misery which they cause; and, blind to these ills, it does nothing to remove them. On the other hand, there may come evil times and conditions when pessimism may be fully justified—that is, when things are evil, and only evil continually, and are growing worse and worse; times when, unless the forces of evil that prevail and are on the increase are met and overcome, things will inevitably go not only to the bad but to their worst.

<sup>1</sup> Leibnitz, “*Essais de Theodicee*,” p. 199. Fairbairn, “*Philosophy of the Christian Religion*,” p. 105.

<sup>2</sup> Schopenhauer’s best-known disciple was Von Hartmann concerning whom Strauss, the destructive New Testament critic, made the facetious observation: “Von Hartmann says that this world is so bad that none would have been better. Von Hartmann’s philosophy is part of the world and as such it is so bad that it would have been better if it had never been.”

This type of pessimism, fully warranted by conditions, often marked the messages of the Hebrew prophets and led them to cry out and spare not; and it was only because they saw things evil as they really were, and the inevitable outcome thereof, that their hearts and tongues flamed forth with a passion for righteousness and found expression in messages that aroused, and, by arousing, saved the nation. It is only when optimism sees things as they are, and sees things whole and in their entirety, that it becomes the true and worthy attribute of a prophet of righteousness and prepares him for moral leadership. Optimism is inherent in the faith of theism because the Christian theist is he who believes that this world is governed by a personal God who, while he works in and through men, and may tarry long because of his workers, yet doeth according to his will in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth.

An optimist has much and frequent need of patience, of the very patience of God. "He that believeth will not make haste;" nor will he allow himself to grow needlessly discouraged while waiting for the good to triumph over the evil that is often rampant. "The pessimistic mood is never very remote from any of us," a distinguished Christian scholar has well said; and even the best of men is liable to be so overcome by a vision of the sins and iniquities that sometimes prevail among the wicked, and by the indifference and lethargy that may characterise the good, that, for the time being at least, the pendulum swings to the zero point on the dial, and he is tempted to lose heart and give up the fight.

There are "black Fridays" and "blue Mondays" that come into the lives of even the best and saintliest of men; and some days an ill wind blows from the East, and its wings are full of the quills of porcupines, and there is nothing to do but let it blow until the compass changes. And it will change, and the change for the brighter and better day will come soonest to him who believes and loves while he waits. There are some days when it takes more grace and endurance to be quiet and wait, than it does on other days to achieve great things in the realm of the spiritual life. No man ought to write his creed

on a "black Friday," or a "blue Monday," or when the "East wind" is blowing. The real and true man is the man at his best. And when a normal Christian man is at his best, he always believes profoundly in the overruling providence of an all-wise, all-good and all-powerful God, and loves to think of him then as the all-loving Father. Faith in the omnipotence of love is the foundation of optimism.

No truth concerning Divine Providence is more comforting than to know that God not only rules, but overrules; and, although in a world of moral free agents it must needs be that men individually and collectively can and do act contrary to his will, there are bounds beyond which human free agency cannot go. Although much that happens in our world is not according to his will and not due to his ruling, there are no realms of creaturely existence where God cannot and does not overrule. Though all things human disappoint us and fail, his overruling power and providence will never fail. His overruling providence, therefore, is the guarantee that all things shall be made to work for good to them that love God and that prove the purity and sincerity of their love for him by the way they love and serve their fellow men. This faith alone can make it possible for us to sing with Browning:

God's in his heaven,  
And all's right with the world.

"The faith that grows from more to more in the individual soul, and that strengthens itself from generation to generation in the community," says Dr. Borden P. Bowne, "is that we are in our Father's hands, and that, having brought us thus far on our God-ward way, he may well be trusted to finish the work he has begun. As long as this faith remains, men will go on singing hymns, praying prayers, and chanting Te Deums in the face of the grim and disquieting aspects of experience; but if this faith should ever permanently perish there would be an end of all optimism."

6. *Suffering and Song*

It has passed into a proverb that the poets learn in suffering what they teach in song. The songs of the ages, the great hymns of the heart, were not written by the poets for mere pastime, but, as a rule, were born of experiences the deepest that human souls are ever called to pass through.

Possibly of all afflictions that befall human beings the loss of sight would be accounted the greatest; and yet among the sons and daughters of affliction there are no sufferers who, as a class, illustrate more beautifully the divine uses of adversity and the beneficent results of a cheerful acquiescence in the providence that permits misfortunes, than do the blind. Possibly there is no blind person that ever lived that has contributed altogether so much to the spiritual comfort and happiness of others as did Fanny Crosby, the blind poetess, who wrote more Christian hymns than any woman that ever lived—and more than any man that ever lived with the one exception of Charles Wesley. It was her serene trust and cheerful faith in God that was the secret of her power to minister to others and inspire them with her songs; and she lets us into this secret in her hymn beginning “Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine” :—

Perfect submission, perfect delight,  
Visions of rapture now burst on my sight,  
Angels descending, bring from above,  
Echoes of mercy, whispers of love.

Perfect submission, all is at rest,  
I in my Saviour am happy and blest,  
Watching and waiting, looking above,  
Filled with his goodness, lost in his love.

This is my story, this is my song,  
Praising my Saviour all the day long!

Some one, speaking to Frances Ridley Havergal once of Fanny Crosby’s blindness, added: “But her heart can see.” This called forth from the gifted poetess and hymn-writer of England a beautiful tribute in verse to her blind sister across

the sea, from which we quote (in a somewhat condensed and slightly altered form) the following lines:

How can she sing in the dark like this?  
What is her fountain of light and bliss?  
With never the light of a loving face,  
Must not the world be a desolate place?

Oh, her heart can see, her heart can see!  
And its sight is strong and swift and free.  
Never the ken of mortal eye  
Could pierce so deep and far and high  
As the eagle vision of hearts that dwell  
In that lofty, sunlit citadel.

For the King himself, in his tender grace,  
Hath shown her the brightness of his face;  
She can read his law as a shining chart,  
For his finger hath written it on her heart;  
And she reads his love, for on all her way  
His hand is writing it every day.  
Oh, this is why she sings so free:  
Her heart can see, her heart can see!

“Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.” God seems to have more than compensated Fanny Crosby for the loss of her eyesight by giving her heart-sight and by revealing to her visions of spiritual light and moral beauty that are rarely ever given to mortals whose eyes are occupied with beholding the sights of the material world.

Milton illustrated very beautifully the spirit of Christ in the way in which he bore the awful affliction that came to him in the loss of his sight. He makes frequent allusion to his blindness in his poems, and always in the sweet spirit of submission to the will of God. This spirit of Christian resignation in which commingling sorrow and joy are seen is very beautifully expressed in the familiar verses, titled “Milton’s Last Poem,” which undertakes to describe the great poet’s feelings with reference to his blindness. It is an interpretative poem written by Elizabeth L. Howell. It is one of the most plaintive and tender little poems in the English language, and

may well be quoted as showing how God in his Providence can and does work out of ill, sometimes at least, beneficent results that could be secured in no other way. It is not the less true, but perhaps all the more true because another than the poet himself wrote the words and put them into his mouth.

I am old and blind!  
Men point at me as smitten by God's frown,  
Afflicted and deserted by my mind,  
Yet I am not cast down.

I am weak; yet dying,  
I murmur not that I no longer see—  
Poor, old, and helpless I the more belong,  
Father supreme, to thee.

Oh! merciful One,  
When men are farthest, then thou art most near,  
When men pass coldly by, my weakness shun,  
Thy chariot wheels I hear.

Thy glorious face  
Is leaning toward me, and its holy light  
Shines in upon my lonely dwelling place,  
And there is no more night.

On my bended knee,  
I recognise thy purpose clearly shown:  
My vision thou hast dimmed that I might see  
Thyself—thyself alone.

I have naught to fear:  
This darkness is the shadow of thy wing;  
Beneath it I am almost sacred—here  
Can come no evil thing.

Oh! I seem to stand  
Trembling where the feet of mortal never yet had been,  
Wrapped in the radiance of that sinless land  
Which eye hath never seen.

Visions come and go,  
Shapes of resplendent beauty round me throng,  
From angel lips I seem to hear the flow  
Of soft and holy song.

It is nothing now,  
 When heaven is opening on my sightless eyes,  
 When airs from paradise refresh my brow,  
 That earth in darkness lies.

In a pure clime  
 My being fills with rapture; waves of thought  
 Roll in upon my spirit; strains sublime  
 Break over me unsought.

Give me now my lyre!  
 I feel the stirrings of a gift divine;  
 Within my bosom glows unearthly fire,  
 Lit by no hand of mine.

But not to the blind alone, but to all sufferers God has vouchsafed a revelation of himself that can come through no other channel and in no other experience than that of suffering. The sufferings of life, by forcing men into an acquaintance with Him for whom the human heart instinctively cries out in all times of sore distress and need, and by revealing Him as a "very present help in time of trouble," tend to prepare men for calling upon Him in their encounter with the last enemy to be conquered, an encounter which is rarely ever free from suffering of the most intense and trying kind—the sufferings incident to the departure of the soul from the body. From the dying lips of those alone who believe in God do words of triumph come in that last encounter: "thanks be unto God that giveth us the victory!"

## II

## THE DIVINE SIGNIFICANCE OF DEATH

Human life both in its end and in its origin is shrouded in mystery. But for a thing to be enveloped in mystery does not mean that it is without divine significance and high spiritual value. The profoundest facts and truths concerning God's nature and providence are characterised by mystery; and there is no phase of human life where it approaches so near to the mystery that belongs to Deity as in its extension beyond death

into the realm of pure spirits that are subject to none of the limitations of matter and of time as we know them here. If it be true, as Christianity teaches, that the highest significance of this life grows out of the fact that it is a state in which we are to prepare for another world, for a higher and more perfect state of existence, then it cannot be a misnomer to call death a pathway, indeed a very doorway, to God. It behooves the Christian philosopher, therefore, to contemplate death most calmly of all men in order that he may interpret it wisely and truly as befits one who believes it to be a revealer of God.

### *I. Death as a Revealer of God and Immortality*

If this life in the flesh did not end, there would and could, of course, be for us no other life; if this world were our eternal abiding place, there could be for us no other world. The distinction between mortality and immortality would be obliterated. If this life and this world satisfied all our desires and the needs of body, mind and spirit, there would be no need for another life and another world. But none of these conditions are true of this life. There is never a birth into this life that is not followed in the course of a few years by death; and of all the facts appertaining to this life none is altogether so serious and impressive to the individual as the death that brings this life to an abrupt and absolute end. And as to this world being an abiding place, it is, on the contrary, a world where everything is always changing and moving on and being transformed into something in some way different from what it now is. This life and this world do not, except for brief and occasional periods, fully satisfy any living soul; and the satisfaction which one feels in these brief sporadic spells of existence is due in no small degree to the fact that something is then and there singing to the soul within that "it is better further on."

It is death that gives us the idea of deathlessness; and makes us serious and thoughtful and appreciative of blessings while they last, and desirous of making the most and the best of this life, and especially so in so far as this life is related to and determinative of our lot in another life and another world.

It takes the darkness of night to reveal to us the greatness of our universe and show us worlds of light that we could never see by day. Every grave that is opened is a window through which we look not down but up and beyond into the life eternal. We purchase deathlessness with death, and only by dying can we pay the price of immortality. It is the death of our loved ones and the ever-present certainty that death awaits us that makes us think of and long for a life that is lasting and a world where the limitations of this life are lifted and there is unalloyed fulness of joy.

As the idea of the finite in space necessitates the thought of the infinite, so the idea of the finite in time necessitates the thought of the eternal; and infinity and eternity are meaningless without an infinite and eternal Personality. And thus it is that our very mortality reveals to us the life immortal and the Being who alone has immortality in himself and can give it to other beings. But while these rational meditations on and inferences from mortality and death reveal God and immortality to us, and while it is true that

"A solemn murmur of the soul  
Tells of a world to be,  
As travellers hear the billows roll  
Before they reach the sea—"

it is also true that it is Christ who alone has brought to light in the Gospel a sure, steady and satisfying doctrine of life and immortality. And when he discoursed on the Father's house of many mansions and described the highest happiness of heaven for his disciples by saying that "where I am there ye may be," he was but declaring that death is in the highest and truest sense to every Christian pilgrim the gateway at the end of a path that leads inevitably to God.

## 2. *The Why of Physical Death—Its Moral and Educational Value*

The theistic philosopher, who alone can give an adequate and satisfactory explanation of death in its spiritual significance, does not minify its sorrow or its horror in recognising its

essential place in the purpose and government of God. The Christian philosopher interprets it thus:—

"The awful cruelty of death lies in its not only ending one's own life, but in so often making desolate innocent and helpless lives that would otherwise be happy. If it were one's own loss only, it would be possible to die like a stoic without a murmur and without a tear. It is the desolation of the living that is so painful to thought, turning death into the sum of all our miseries. But when all has been thought and said, why should death seem an evil? Birth is not, and surely death is but the complement and counterpart of birth. The one is because the other is; it is because the grave is never full that the cradle is never empty. Then how without death could man realise the meaning of life? How feel the immensity, the possibilities, the god-like qualities, the capability of endless gain or loss contained within the terms of his own being? The picture of man before and after he knew death in the 'Legend of Jubal' is as true to experience as to imagination. In the old, soft, sweet days before men knew death, when all that was known of it was the single black spot in the memory of Cain, his descendants lived in gladsome idleness; they played, they sang, they loved, they danced, in a life that had no gravity and no greatness; but when the second death came, and men saw that there had come to one of their own race a sleep from which there was no awakening, a new meaning stole into life. The horizon which limited it defined it, and made it great. Time took a new value; affection, by growing more serious, became nobler; men thought of themselves more worthily and of their deeds more truly when they saw that a night came when no man could work. Friends and families lived in a tenderer light when the sun was known to shine but for a season; earth became lovelier when they thought the place which knew them now would soon know them no more. The limit set to time drove their thoughts out towards eternity. The idea of the death, which was to claim them, bade them live in earnest, made them feel that there was something greater than play; for death had breathed into life the spirit out of which all tragic and all heroic things come."

"We see, therefore, that death has to be viewed not as a matter of a single person, but of collective man; and it works out

the good of collective man by doing no injustice to the individual, but rather using him to fulfil the highest function it is granted to mortal men to perform. So let us say that however men may conceive death, it belongs to those sufferings by which mankind learns obedience, and is made perfect.”<sup>1</sup>

Beautiful, indeed, as well as religiously and philosophically true are these words of Dr. A. M. Fairbairn concerning death.

### 3. *Death the Removal of Physical Limitations to Man's Spiritual Activities*

Christian theism assumes that matter is not the creator and master of mind, but, on the contrary, the creature and servant of mind; and that the body is not the maker of spirit, but rather something that was made for the spirit. The appeal to consciousness settles, as if with the authority of a “categorical imperative,” not only the fact of man's mind being more than matter, but the greater fact, that his spirit, though finite, is so immeasurably superior to his fleshly body that it bears as a divine birthright a claim to immortality. This being true, that event in the life of the spirit which we call death, the departure of the spirit from the fleshly body, it is not unreasonable to suppose, will make possible a clearer vision of God and a closer fellowship with him than is possible during the “days of the flesh.” Only after the veil of the flesh is removed will man be enabled to see God “face to face.” In other words the physical body, instead of being the condition and basis of life and thought and spiritual activities, is rather a limitation upon the full and perfect functioning of the spirit.

This is one of the thoughts suggested by Professor William James's little book titled “Human Immortality,” where he refers to Kant “as coming very close to the transmission theory in his idea of the function of the brain in relation to thought and immortality. He held that the death of the body might, indeed, be the end of sense-perception and of the sensational use of the mind, but only the beginning of the strictly intel-

<sup>1</sup> “The Philosophy of the Christian Religion.”

lectual use—that the body would thus be not the cause of our thinking, but merely a condition restrictive thereof; and, although essential to our sensuous and animal consciousness, it might be regarded as impeding our pure spiritual life. According to this view the lower is explained by the higher, matter by spirit, instead of *vice versa*, and thereby attains to an explanation which is ultimately tenable, instead of one which is ultimately absurd.”<sup>1</sup> Professor James quotes from Schiller’s “Riddles of the Sphinx” the following statements setting forth the same idea as to the relation of mind to matter in the human body:

“Matter is an admirably calculated machinery for regulating, limiting and restraining the consciousness which it encases. . . . If the material encasement be coarse and simple, as in the lower organisms, it permits only a little intelligence to permeate through it; if it is delicate and complex, it leaves more pores and exists, as it were, for the manifestations of consciousness . . . which permits us strange glimpses of a lucidity that divines the realities of the transcendent world. And this gives the final word to materialism; it consists in showing in detail . . . that materialism is a putting of the cart before the horse, which may be rectified by just inverting the connection between matter and consciousness. Matter is not that which produces consciousness, but that which limits it, and confines its intensity within certain limits; material organism does not construct consciousness out of arrangements of atoms, but contracts its manifestations within the sphere which it permeates.”

This being true, it follows that so long as man’s physical body encases and imprisons and conditions his spirit, it puts limitations upon all his spiritual activities. Regarding mind and thought from the theistic point of view, then, we may say that instead of being the product of the brain, they are rather limited by their connection with the brain, and whenever the connection between the spirit and body are broken—as, for instance, by the death of the body—the mind may find its power of thought, not destroyed as materialism declares to be

<sup>1</sup> See J. W. Lee’s “Religion of Science,” pp. 225-6.

the case, but greatly increased by the removal of the limitations of the body. If this be true, death, instead of ending all, is in reality the gateway to a larger life, and the beginning of the development of mind and the acquisition of knowledge under conditions infinitely superior to those existing in this fleshly life. The vision of God, then, here in the flesh is but as the moonlight is to the sunlight when compared with the vision we may hope to have of him in the future life that begins at death.

#### 4. *God, Death and Immortality as Interpreted by the Poets*

Among men of letters they who believe most profoundly in God and personal immortality—and believe in the one because they believe in the other—are the poets. If there be some for whom death ends all, it is not the poets.

To the poets all nature abounds in symbols that teach that what we call death is the gateway to and condition of "life that shall endless be." This is the truth found in the following lines by Elizabeth Case that make inseparable faith in God and faith in continuous life:

Whoever plants a seed beneath the sod,  
And waits to see it push away the clod,  
    He trusts in God.

Whoever sees 'neath field of winter snow,  
The silent harvest of the future grow,  
    God's power must know.

Whoever says when clouds are in the sky,  
"Be patient, heart, light breaketh by and by,"  
    Trusts the Most High.

Whoever lies down on his couch to sleep,  
Content to lock each sense in slumber deep,  
    Knows God will keep.

Another poet has shown the inseparable connection between life and death in these beautiful words that are far-reaching in their significance:

“Life evermore is fed by death,  
 In earth and sea and sky,  
 And that a rose may breathe its breath  
 Something must die.”

If this be true of death and life in the animal world, why should it be thought a thing less true of those higher physico-spiritual beings who in one element of their duplex nature are akin to the vegetable and animal world, and in the other are akin to God and the angels? The poets with their marvellous insight and deeply penetrating power of vision, and with their irrepressible passion for uttering the truths they feel and see, declare with one voice that “it is not death to die”—that death is for those who are in harmony with God the divinely appointed gateway to the perfect and unending life, and this even when it is due to outrageous wrong done by wicked men.

It is well for one who reads the story of Joseph and Pharaoh, or John the Baptist and Herod, or St. Stephen and Saul of Tarsus, to turn from history to a poet’s interpretation of such events such as that found in the lines of James Russell Lowell which tell the great truth of how men of heroic and noble character who have suffered the most outrageous wrongs, instead of finding in their sufferings proof that God had forsaken them, have rather found themselves in the very presence of Him who is forever keeping a close watch above his own:

Truth forever on the scaffold,  
 Wrong forever on the throne,  
 Yet that scaffold sways the future,  
 And behind the dim unknown  
 Standeth God within the shadow,  
 Keeping watch above his own.

W. W. Story closes his “Hymn of the Conquered Who Fell in the Battle of Life” with words that teach the same great lesson:—

Speak, History! who are life’s victors? Unroll thy long annals and say,  
 Are they those whom the world called the victors—who won the success of a day?

The martyrs, or Nero? The Spartans, who fell at Thermopylæ's tryst.  
Or the Persians and Xerxes? His judges or Socrates? Pilate or Christ?

Happy is he who has learned to read history with profound faith in the truth here expressed.

Few if any are the poets who have written more beautifully of death as a gateway to God than has John Greenleaf Whittier. Many of his verses concerning death and the future life are so expressive of love and faith in God that they have become familiar throughout the civilised world; and this because they express not merely his own faith and feeling but the faith and feeling that characterise seekers after God everywhere through all time. The life eternal to him is embosomed in divine love:—

I know not what the future hath  
Of marvel or surprise,  
Assured alone that life and death  
His mercy underlies;  
And if my heart and flesh are weak  
To bear the untried pain,  
The bruised reed He will not break,  
But strengthen and sustain.

And so, beside the Silent Sea,  
I wait the muffled oar;  
No harm from Him can come to me,  
On ocean or on shore.  
I know not where His islands lift  
Their fronded palms in air,  
I only know I cannot drift  
Beyond His love and care.

And Whittier believed that we shall not only see and know God in the life to come but that they who know and love their fellow men here will recognise and know and love each other in the world to come where spirits only dwell:

Yet love will dream and faith will trust,  
Since he who knows our need is just,  
That somehow, somewhere, meet we must.

Alas for him who never sees  
The stars shine through his cypress trees !  
Who, hopeless, lays his dead away,  
Nor looks to see the breaking day  
Across the mournful marble play !

Who hath not learned in hours of faith,  
The touch to flesh and sense unknown,  
That Life is ever Lord of death,  
And Love can never lose its own.

Whittier interpreted God, heaven and immortality all alike in terms of love :—

Alone, O Love ineffable !  
Thy saving name is given ;  
To turn aside from thee is hell,  
To walk with Thee is heaven !

“In Memoriam” is in the truest sense a poem that constitutes for perplexed and troubled souls a pathway to God. The divinity and immortality of love are its theme, and they are made all the more luminous because set on a dark background of death :—“Love can never lose its own ; it is of God and can never die ; those whom God loves can never cease to be, and those who are one with the God of love can never lose the objects of their affection ; love must grow with our growth both here and hereafter.” This profound heartcry, as is well known, was called forth from the depths of the poet’s soul by the loss of his nearest and dearest friend, Arthur Henry Hallam, who died in 1833. The poet was plunged into the abyss of darkness and doubt. In the deep anguish of his bereaved soul the foundations were laid for this great poem. It was an awful struggle that he describes himself as passing through before he emerged with his feet upon the solid rock and this victorious song upon his lips. His faith and love now took hold on unseen and eternal things, took hold on God. It was through Christ that he won the victory, and his great poem has brought faith and light and victory to many others who have been plunged by the death of friends and loved ones into darkness and doubt. Among the verses that witness to

his faith in the one God who was revealed in and through the divine Christ, are the following:

Strong Son of God, immortal Love,  
 Whom we, that have not seen thy face,  
 By faith, and faith alone, embrace,  
 Believing where we cannot prove;

Thou wilt not leave us in the dust;  
 Thou madest man, he knows not why,  
 He thinks he was not made to die;  
 And thou hast made him: thou art just.

Thou seemest human and divine,  
 The highest, holiest, manhood thou;  
 Our wills are ours, we know not how;  
 Our wills are ours to make them thine.

Our little systems have their days;  
 They have their day and cease to be;  
 They are but broken lights of thee,  
 And thou, O Lord, art more than they.

One God, who ever lives and loves,  
 One God, one law, one element,  
 And one far-off divine event,  
 To which the whole creation moves.

The man who wrote thus of Christ in the prime of his young manhood was true to Christ all through his long and fruitful life, and his dying swan-song was a calm note of faith and victory that has won its way into the heart of the world. When asked just before his death what he desired most of all, his reply was "A new vision of God." The "Strong Son of God" of the "In Memoriam" is the "Pilot" whom he confidently expected to see "face to face" when he "crossed the bar"—and who can doubt that he saw him, and that he sees him still?

Sunset and evening star,  
 And one clear call for me!  
 And may there be no moaning of the bar  
 When I put out to sea.

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,  
    Too full for sound and foam,  
When that which drew from out the boundless deep  
    Turns again home.

Twilight and evening bell,  
    And after that the dark !  
And may there be no sadness of farewell  
    When I embark ;  
For though from out our bourne of time and place  
    The flood may bear me far,  
I hope to see my Pilot face to face  
    When I have crossed the bar.

#### 5. *The Confidence and Sunny Certainty of Christ Concerning the Future*

The poet modestly "hopes," but St. Paul's faith in the future life led him to say, "I know." Nothing can be more assuring than the calm confidence and sunny certainty with which Christ speaks of the future life, which for the Christian believer he always associates with God and eternal companionship with himself. "In my Father's house"; "that where I am there ye may be also." The Christian believer is he who has "life," who is already in possession of "eternal life." Whatever may be our speculations concerning the future fate of those who have not in this life walked the paths that lead to God, who have not found God and lived in companionship with him, Christ has left us in no uncertainty as to the future of those who "believe in God and believe also in him." "If it were not so, I would have told you"—a word this of infinite significance. There is no doctrine of the Christian religion more certain and assuring than this—that they who in this life travel the paths that lead to God will find death a doorway into not another but a higher life, where they will, with the eyes of the spirit, see God "face to face" and be with him forever.

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ABBOTT, LYMAN: *Seeking After God; What Christianity Means to Me.*

AINSLIE, PETER: *If Not a United Church—What?*

AMES, E. S.: *The Psychology of Religious Experience.*

BALFOUR, A. J.: *Theism and Thought; The Foundations of Belief.*

BALLARD, F.: *Christian Essentials; The Miracles of Unbelief.*

BARRY, F. R.: *Christianity and Psychology.*

BARTON, G. A.: *The Religions of the World.*

BECKWITH, C. A.: *The Idea of God.*

BEET, J. AGAR: *Through Christ to God.*

BENNETT, L. E.: *The Realm of God.*

BETHUNE-BAKER, J. F.: *The Faith of the Apostles' Creed.*

BISHOP, C. M.: *Jesus the Worker.*

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WOOD, W. H.: *The Religion of Science.*

YOUNG, W. J.: *When God and Man Meet.*

## INDEX

Abbott, Lyman, 118, 262, 351.  
Addison, Joseph, 113.  
Agassiz, Prof. J. L. R., 97, 219, 253.  
Agnosticism, 53; sometimes expresses faith, 489.  
Ames, E. S., 535.  
Analogy between human and divine workers, 111.  
Anthropomorphism, 183.  
Anti-theistic theories as to God and nature, 46  
Apocalyptic writings, God revealed in, 266.  
Arguments in proof of God's existence, 239.  
Aristotle, 79, 90.  
Arnold, Matthew, 58, 256, 383.  
Arnold, Thomas, 357.  
Astronomy, a pathway to God, 131.  
Athanasius, 179.  
Athanasian creed, 457.  
Atheism, difficulties of, 123.  
Atoms, defined, 101.  
Augustine, St., 144, 190, 348, 478.  
Authority in religious faith, whence derived, 215.  
Avery, C. W., 123.  
Babylonia, ancient religion of, 81.  
Bacon, Lord, 213, 219.  
Barnes, Canon, 169.  
Bashford, Bishop J. W., 324.  
Beauty, a pathway to God, 120.  
Beets, J. Agar, 111, 399.  
Beliefs and theories in religion, distinguished, 56.  
Berkeley, Bishop, idealistic philosophy, 222.  
Betelgeux, largest known star, 114.  
Bible, a divine-human Book, 37, 313.  
Biology, a pathway to God, 138.  
Boscawen, quotations from, 81.  
Bowne, Borden P., 208, 224, 350, 551.  
Breasted, J. H., 85.  
Bright, John, 268.  
Brooks, Phillips, 34.  
Brown, O. E., 427.  
Browning, Robert, 180.  
Bruce, A. B., 383, 457, 468, 524.  
Bryan, W. J., 116.  
Buckham, J. W., 119.  
Buddha, 413.  
Buddhism, 89.  
Cadman, S. Parkes, 174.  
Calderwood, 223, 235.  
Calvinism, 196; providential mission of, 460; God of, 461.  
Campbell, Alexander, 425.  
Candler, W. A., 500.  
Carlyle, Thomas, 220, 268, 449.  
Carré, H. B., 273.  
Carter, Thomas, 299, 523.  
Case, E., 561.  
Chalmers, Thomas, 251.  
Chance, impossible explanation of the universe, 117, 220.  
Chemistry, a pathway to God, 134.  
Christ, relation of science to, 149; divine sonship, 271; as interpreted by Paul, 272; as interpreted by John, 274; the Logos (Word), 275, 401; God's best interpreter and revealer, 35, 393; doctrine of God, 395; divine-human person, 400, 406; the incarnation, 402; sceptical hypotheses concerning, 407; influence of, 410; of experience, 519, 521; of history, 526; second coming, 378.  
*Christian Advocate*, 323, 519.

*Christian Century*, 288, 462, 548  
 Christianity, beneficent influence of, 492.  
 Church, Christian, a divine-human institution, 39, 417; definition of, 417; a witness for God, 419; the Church within the Church, 421; social mission of, 424; its divisions, 425; its primary credential, 432; its true catholicity, 433; its agencies, 436; the Christian ministry, 436; Christian schools, 440; Christian literature, 441.

Clark, T. C., 70.  
 Clarke, W. N., 400, 506.  
 Cleanthes, hymn to Zeus, 88.  
 Coleridge, S. T., 321.  
 Comparative religions, 79.  
 Confucianism, 89.  
 Conscience, a witness to God, 197.  
 Consensus gentium, 256.  
 Cook, J. P., 141.  
 Copernicus, 146.  
 Cosmological argument, 245.  
 Coulter, J. M. and M. C., 151.  
*Creeds*, value of, 447; reasons for, 447; contents of, 448; the historic, 450; helps or hindrances to faith, 450, 472; Apostles' Creed, 451; Athanasian Creed, 457; Westminster Confession of Faith, 460; the Thirty-nine Articles, 465.

Criticism, Biblical, 29, 308.  
 Crosby, Fanny, 552.

Dale, R. W., 121, 530.  
 Darwin, Charles, 108, 157, 250.  
 Dawson, M., 160.  
 Death, divine significance of, 555; a revealer of God, 40, 556; its educative value, 558; removes limitations to spirit, 559; as interpreted by the poets, 561.  
 Deism, 52.  
 Democratic ideals affect conception of God, 28.  
 Denny, Professor James, 319.

Denominations, religious, good and evil of, 429.  
 Descartes, argument for divine existence, 228, 240.  
 "Devolution" versus evolution, 159.  
 Doubt, office of in religion, 477; dishonest, 480; honest, 484; when contributory to faith, 483; due to temperament, 484; due to trying experiences, 485; common to and characteristic of developing youth, 487; its cause and cure, 493.

Drummond, Henry, 148, 425.

Dualism, anti-theistic, 48; theistic, 61

Edersheim's enumeration of prophecies, 375.

Egypt, ancient religion of, 85.

Electrons, 104, 135.

Elements in nature, 101, 156

Ellwood, C. A., 179.

Energy, 99.

Erskine, Thomas, 321.

Ether, 99.

Ethics and religion, how related, 92, 254.

Everett, Edward, 90.

Evil, physical and moral, defined and distinguished, 540; moral, as related to God, 543; moral, as related to human free will, 544; physical, as related to God, 545.

Evolution, cause of doctrinal unrest, 28; defined, 155; materialistic and theistic distinguished, 157, 162; moral, 160; theistic, interpreted by scientists, 162; Christian attitude towards, 169.

Experience, essential to knowledge of God, 503; man's best teacher, 39, 504; Bible a book of experience, 506; God as revealed in, 508; related to prayer, 512; the essence of personal religion, 522; results of, 529; the solvent of religious

perplexities, 531; a bond of Christian unity, 535.

Fairbairn, A. M., 77, 106, 189, 215, 347, 354, 412, 447, 545, 559.

Faith, Christian, restatements of, needed, 31; mutable and permanent elements in, 448; as related to reason, 477; reinforcement of, 492; heroism of, 495; foundation of character, 496.

Faraday, M., 146.

Faunce, W. H. P., 51.

Fisher, G. P., 145, 170, 187, 218, 227, 290, 318, 402.

Fiske, John, 33, 75, 164, 181, 257.

Fitchett, W. H., 191, 270.

Foreknowledge, divine, 273, 381.

Forsythe, P. T., 316, 522.

Fosdick, Harry E., 185, 303.

"Fundamentalists," faith of, 158.

Freud, 202.

Galileo, 146.

Galloway, George, 468.

Garvie, A. E., 462.

Geology, a pathway to God, 136, 163.

Gibbon, Thomas, 496.

Gilder, R. W., 500.

Gladstone, W. E., 268, 496.

Glover, T. R., 520.

Gnosticism, 49.

God, existence doubted, 27; idea of, innate, 34, 235; unknowable, 53; theistic conception of, 55; dwelling-place of, 67; immanence, 63, 68; omnipotence, 68; reinterpreted, 64; Fatherhood of, 270, 397; love of, 270, 397; unity of, 276; spirituality of, 277; personality of, 278; Trinity, 279; post-apostolic development, 281, 299; as revealed by Christ, 301, 394; in Christ, 400; through Christ, 405; revealed in experience, 514; conceived of as enemy, 515; as taskmaster, 516; as friend, 517; as loving Father, 518; making God lovable, 519; nature and grace reveal the same God, 530; "Acts of God" misinterpreted, 546.

Gordon, George A., 181, 208, 340, 402.

Gore, Charles, 31.

Government, human and divine, 206.

Greece, ancient religion of, 87.

Gregory, miracles of, 347.

Grotius, Hugo, 90, 374.

Gwatkin, H. M., 48, 91, 174.

Hale, G. E., 150.

Harnack, Professor, 402.

Havergal, F. R., 552.

Hearn, M., 499.

Heart, the human, a pathway to God, 190.

Heathen religions, Christian attitude towards, 29; seekers after God, 76.

Heavens, God revealed in the, 112.

Hebrew monotheism, 57; history a revelation of God, 264; records, superiority of, 289.

Hegel, 90.

Helium, 132.

Hibben, President J. G., 166.

Higher Criticism of the Bible, 308.

Hilarion, miracles of, 346.

Holy Spirit, advent of, 297.

Homer, 87.

Hough, L. H., 182.

Howell, E. L., 553.

Hudson, C. E., 201.

Huxley, Thomas, 161.

Idealism and realism in philosophy and religion, 222, 224.

Imagination, essential to conception of God, 198.

Immortality, revealed by death, 556; as revealed by Christ, 556.

Incarnation of Christ, 402.

Inertia of matter, 141.

Inge, Dean W. R., 469.

Inorganic world, 99.

Inspiration of Scripture defined, 307; traditional doctrine of, 308; view of modern Biblical scholars, 310; the two views compared, 311; Biblical proof of, 315; practical proof of, 317; internal evidence of, 319.

Intellect, the human, a path to God, 188.

Jacks, L. P., 479, 533.

James, Professor William, 201, 529, 560.

Jerome, miracles recorded by, 346.

Jesus, influence of, 410.

Jevons, F. B., 79.

Job, Book of, 267.

John the Baptist, 486.

Johnson, E. H., 200.

Jones, Sir Henry, 31, 467.

Kant, 131, 197, 249.

Keble, John, 122.

Keen, Dr. W. W., 168.

Keller, Helen, 34.

Kelvin, Lord, 148, 218.

Kepler, J., 127, 146.

King, Henry Churchill, 52.

Lecky, W. H., 90, 513.

Lee, James W., 161, 221.

Lee, Robert E., 253.

Leibnitz, 549.

Life, origin of, 106.

Linnæus, 107, 138.

Locke, John, 34.

Logic, value of in theology, 237.

Longfellow, H. W., 97.

Lotze, Hermann, 509.

Lowell, James Russell, 90, 482, 562.

Luther, Martin, 425, 498.

Magic in religion, 344.

Mansell, 193.

Martensen, view of miracles, 342.

Martineau, James, 198, 382.

Mary, the Virgin, 455.

Materialism, 49,

Matter, 100.

Maxwell, J. C., 146.

McConnell, Bishop F. J., 236, 489.

McCosh, James, 220, 227.

McGiffert, A. C., 451.

Menzies, History of Religion, 88.

Messiah, prophecies concerning, 370; different interpretations of, 374; progress from lower to higher conceptions, 296.

Mill, J. S., 220.

Millikan, R. A., 148, 167.

Milton, John, 554.

Mind, a function of spirit, not of matter, 217; evidence of in the physical universe, 218.

Miracles, place in traditional theology, 330; argument from, 330; of the Old Testament, 331; of Christ, 331; regarded variously as helps or hindrances to faith, 334; reaction against, 339; by some criticized and discredited, 340; evidential value of, 342; adjustment to faith in an age of science, 344; ecclesiastical, 345.

Moffatt, J. D., 464.

Mohammedanism, 89.

Molecules defined, 101.

Monism, materialistic and pantheistic, 49.

Monotheism, Hebrew and Christian, 57.

Moral argument for God's existence, 252.

Moulton, W. J., 238.

Mouzon, Bishop E. D., 507.

Mozley, Canon, 361.

Müller, John von, 527.

Müller, Max, 92.

Nature, defined, 97; the natural and the supernatural alike divine, 329; physical and human, both reveal God, 33, 184; spiritual interpretation of, 32, 118.

New Testament revelation of God, 269.

Newman, John Henry, 455, 534.

Newton, Isaac, 131, 146.

Occurrences and concurrences distinguished, 220.  
Old Testament revelation of God, 263.  
Ontological argument for God's existence, 242.  
Organic world, 106.  
Optimism in philosophy and theology, 549; its interpretation of evil, 548.

Pantheism defined, 50.  
Parenthood, human and divine, 204.  
Parkhurst, Chas. H., criticism of Calvinism, 464.  
Parliament of Religions, 93.  
Pasteur, L., 148.  
Paulsen, F., rejection of miracles, 340.  
Pentateuch, its revelation of God, 263.  
Perplexities, religious, 479; solved by experience, 531.  
Persia, ancient religion of, 81.  
Pessimism, its interpretation of existence, 549.  
Philo's doctrine of the "Logos," 402.  
Philosophy defined, 214, 233; its relation to science, 216.  
Physics, a pathway to God, 134.  
Plato, 88, 213.  
Polytheism, 46.  
Pope, W. B., 183, 331.  
Predestination and Divine fore-knowledge, 273.  
Premillenarians, 378.  
Progressive revelation, 285; as seen in the Old Testament, 288, 292; as seen in the New Testament literature, 294, 298.  
Prophecy, argument from, 362; defined, 363; more than prediction, 363; its moral element and value, 364; predictive prophecy, 372; Messianic, 370; fulfilment in Christ, 370; examples of Messianic prophecy, 372; different interpretations of, 374; "accommodations" in New Testament use of Old Testament, 379; reaction against the argument from prophecy, 377; moral value of, 383.  
Prophetic writings, God revealed in, 265.  
Prophets, their inspiration, 364; wherein their functions differed from those of the priests, 386; their passion for righteousness, 384; their optimism, 388; their universalism, 388.  
Psalms, God revealed in, 268.  
Psychology, a pathway to God, 186; the "New Psychology" as related to religion and Christian faith, 201.  
Purdy, A. T., 532.

Quotations in New Testament from the Old Testament, 310.

Radiant-matter, 104.  
Ramsay, W., 132.  
Randolph, John, 496.  
Rashdall, H. H., 324.  
Rauschenbusch, Walter, 425.  
Realism in philosophy and theology, 226.  
Reason, office and value of in religion, 41, 235.  
Religion, definition of, 73; origin of, 73; evolution of, 74; ubiquity and influence of, 76.  
Religions, comparative, 79; changed Christian attitude towards heathen religions, 29; the ethical test of truth in religion, 89.  
Renan, E., 407, 527.  
Revelation, progressive, 285; conditioned and limited by human interpreters, in the Old Testament, 288; in the New Testament, 294.  
Rice, J. A., 302, 506.  
Rice, W. N., 171, 195.  
Richards, W. C., 152.

Romanes, G. J., 146.  
 Rome, ancient religion of, 87.  
 Ross, G. A. Johnston, 119, 146,  
 296, 453.

Sabatier, A., 93.  
 Sanday, W., 74, 340.  
 Scepticism invades the ministry,  
 490.  
 Schaff, Philip, 461.  
 Schopenhauer, the pessimist, 549.  
 Science, defined, 127; purpose of,  
 128; wonders of, 134; relation  
 to Christian faith, 28, 32, 143,  
 149.  
 Scientists, the proper teachers of  
 science, 129; the Christian faith  
 of, 146.  
 Sex, applied to deity, 47, 206.  
 Shaler, N. S., 136.  
 Shedd, W. G. T., 309.  
 Simpson, J. Y., 266, 469.  
 Sin creates need of God, 510.  
 Smith, Francis H., 149.  
 Smith, Sir George Adam, 294,  
 372, 386.  
 Smyth, Newman, 253, 404, 525.  
 Socrates, 87.  
 Soper, E. D., 79.  
 Sovereignty, divine, and service,  
 399.  
 Spencer, Herbert, 78, 165.  
 Stanley, Dean A. P., 361.  
 Starbuck, E. D., 201.  
 Statement of faith, new, needed,  
 467; recent, by Church of Scot-  
 land, 465.  
 Stearns, L. F., 310.  
 Stirred souls, the Church's need  
 of, 442.  
 Stoic doctrine of Providence, 88.  
 Story, W. W., 562.  
 Strauss, D. F., 173, 407, 527.  
 Suffering, divine significance of,  
 40, 539; educative and moral  
 value of, 545; as interpreted by  
 the poets, 552.  
 Supernatural element in Chris-  
 tianity, 329; natural and super-  
 natural alike divine, 329; rein-  
 forcement of the natural  
 needed, 330; reinterpretation  
 of, 348; new approach to, 348;  
 faith in, reaffirmed, 353.  
 Synoptic Gospels, approach to  
 Christ, 357.

Teleological argument, 247.  
 Tennyson, Alfred, 107, 483, 565.  
 Theism, Christian, 59, 276; tradi-  
 tional and modern forms, 62;  
 how related to philosophy, 229.  
 Thoburn, Bishop J. M., 323.  
 Thomson, J. Arthur, 104, 114,  
 130.  
 Thirty-nine Articles of Religion,  
 465.  
 Tigert, Bishop J. J., 233.  
 Torrey, R. A., 309.  
 Townsend, Luther T., 488.  
 Trinity, the divine, analogy fur-  
 nished by psychology, 203; as  
 set forth in the Creeds, 457; a  
 post-Apostolic development of  
 theology, 281, 301.  
 Twenty-five Articles of Metho-  
 distism, 465.  
 Tillett, W. F., poems quoted, 209,  
 414.

Ueberweg, History of philosophy,  
 87, 219.

Virgin birth of Jesus, 455.

Wallace, Lew, 355.  
 Watson, John, 325, 473.  
 Ward, Harry F., 425.  
 Wesley, John, 172, 425.  
 Westminster Confession of Faith,  
 460; reinterpreted, 463; at-  
 tempts at revision, 463.  
 White, Alexander, 455.  
 White, Gilbert, 109.  
 Whittier, John Greenleaf, 423,  
 563.  
 Will, the human, a pathway  
 God, 193.

Winchell, Alexander, 163.  
Wisdom literature of Old Testament, its revelation of God, 267.  
Wordsworth, William, 118.

World War, the, as related to God, 27.  
Zeus, hymn to, by Cleanthes, 88.  
Zinzendorf, Count, 425.















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